

One of Us: Constructions of Englishness in the Writing of Elizabeth Gaskell

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Veronica Hoyt

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Abstract

Existing criticism that addresses the concept of Englishness in Elizabeth Gaskell's writing is sparse and confined to a small part of her oeuvre, and, furthermore, has, in the main, placed Englishness (and England) in Gaskell's fiction either within a Derridian paradigm of endless signifiers or in the realm of metaphor. I place Gaskell's Englishness within its socio-historical milieu, and argue that, for Gaskell, England is primarily *literal*, her green and pleasant land, and that, in her writing, she envisages a slowly evolving and flatter English social system incorporating a wider selection of the English population than was the norm in the mid-nineteenth century. She wrestles with the place of the 'other' within English society. Indeed, as a female and as a Unitarian, Gaskell is herself 'other,' outside of hegemonic Englishness, and her outsider status had a marked influence on her Englishness.

I argue that there are ambiguities in Gaskell's vision for a more egalitarian Englishness. Her Englishness is couched in middle-class terms, in which, for Gaskell, the entry requirement into the 'in group' of Englishness (by, for example, the working classes) is middle-class acculturation, and she presents both the benefits and limitations of her liberal, middle-class perspective.

Contemporary topics that inform Gaskell's fiction include industrial change, economic liberalism, colonial expansion, political reform, and scientific debate, each of which brought issues of nationhood and identity into focus. Gaskell's primary vehicle for producing Englishness in this historical context was through short stories and novels, although her essays and letters are also significant. I focus on four key areas which provide entry points into her constructions of Englishness: race, empire, imperial trade (especially tea, opium, and cotton), and gender/masculinity.

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Textual Notes/List of Abbreviations

The following is a list of Elizabeth Gaskell's works quoted in this thesis and their associated abbreviated annotations. Publishing details for these are in the Select Bibliography. All other works by Gaskell mentioned but not quoted can be found in *The Works of Elizabeth Gaskell* (Pickering & Chatto, 2005).

SH	"The Sexton's Hero" (1847)
CSS	"Christmas Storms and Sunshine" (1848)
MB	<i>Mary Barton</i> (1848)
LGE	"The Last Generation in England" (1849)
MC	<i>The Moorland Cottage</i> (1850)
CD	<i>Cranford</i> (1851-53)
SEG	"The Shah's English Gardener" (1852)
RU	<i>Ruth</i> (1853)
MH	"Morton Hall" (1853)
CM	"Company Manners" (1854)
NS	<i>North and South</i> (1854-55)
AAR	"An Accursed Race" (1855)
MLL	<i>My Lady Ludlow</i> (1858)
LtW	<i>Lois the Witch</i> (1859)
SL	<i>Sylvia's Lovers</i> (1863)
CP	<i>Cousin Phillis</i> (1863-64)
WD	<i>Wives and Daughters</i> (1864-66)

The Letters of Mrs Gaskell (eds. J.A.V. Chapple and Arthur Pollard) is cited as *Letters*, and *Further Letters of Mrs Gaskell* (eds. John A.V. Chapple and Alan Shelston) is cited as *Further Letters*.

Preface

Every effort has been made to source the references cited in this thesis. Due, in large part to the Canterbury Earthquakes (2010-2011) with its consequent upheavals to library services, it has been difficult to obtain some references, especially those written in Gaskell's milieu. I have thus had to settle for alternative measures of quoting some nineteenth-century writers from secondary sources.

Introduction

Embarking upon a thesis about Englishness in the nineteenth century, I am mindful of Peter J. Kalliney's caution that "[t]he difference between Britishness and Englishness has always been difficult to define and maintain" (7). Indeed, these concepts are slippery, fluid, and, to some extent at least, in tension with each other.¹ I take as my starting point the proposal that, in the period prior to that of Elizabeth Gaskell (1810-1865), a dominant Britishness emerged, that – especially after the Act of Union in 1707, which politically united Scotland with England and Wales – the emphasis in much of public discussion and debate was on what defined the nation of Great Britain.² The British shared strong links such as a central government; occupation of the same geographical territory (an island, Great Britain); a common language (English);³ an expanding Empire and, over the course of the century, an astronomical growth of wealth derived from trade and the emerging Industrial Revolution; and, finally – and crucially – an established religion (Protestantism).⁴ Moreover, in the

¹ See, for example, Krishan Kumar's first chapter in *The Making of English National Identity*, titled "English or British?" (1-17), or Robert Colls' summation of the concept of British as "an awkward idea" and that the "United Kingdom demonstrated that there was more than one way of being national, even in the same nation" (*Identity* 42-3).

² The Act of Union formalized the connection between England and Scotland begun a century earlier when James VI of Scotland also became James I of England in 1603. Ireland had a separate parliament, subordinate to a large degree to the British parliament, until its Act of Union with Great Britain in 1801.

³ Samuel Johnson wrote in 1777 that language "may be considered as the great barometer of the barbarity or civilization of a people. A poverty of dialect is generally accompanied by savageness and ignorance" (qtd. in Wheeler 195). While English was the privileged language in eighteenth century Britain, languages such as Welsh and Scottish Gaelic continued to be spoken as well. See Tony Crowley's *Proper English?: Readings in Language, History, and Cultural Identity*.

⁴ Most of these concepts were not new in 1707. That Britain was an "island kingdom," for example, had long been acknowledged (Hastings 36), and notions of Britain's special religious status predates even the Protestant Reformation, and can be traced at least as far

century after the Act of Union, the British were increasingly embroiled in defending their island against a common enemy, France, perceived by the British as Catholic,⁵ and, especially after the French Revolution (1789-99) and during the rule of Napoleon (1799-1815),⁶ increasingly tyrannical. Indeed, in many ways, British national identity progressively defined itself during the eighteenth century in opposition to this alien 'other' (Colley 5, 17), and placed much emphasis on concepts such as Protestantism, freedom, and the rule of (common) law and limited government (Black and MacRaild 6). In this period the British national enterprise (winning the war against the French) was deemed by those in power to be more important than regional interests, a point touched on by Gaskell in *Sylvia's Lovers*, set in the 1790s during the Napoleonic Wars, when the press-gangs, despite being widely hated for their negative impact on local communities, continued their coercive efforts on behalf of the Admiralty of Great Britain.⁷

A greater sense of Britishness also emerged in this period in the increasing influence of Edinburgh as an intellectual hub, especially as the centre of the Scottish Enlightenment of the mid to late eighteenth century, which had considerable influence on England in Gaskell's period. Indeed, the political union of 1707 was a catalyst for the fusing of the English-speaking Scottish Lowlanders with their southern (English) neighbours, with whom they had

back as the Venerable Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*, completed in 731 AD, where he writes of "God's new 'chosen' nation elected to replace the sin-stained Briton in the promised land of Britain" (qtd. in Ackroyd xx). The Act of Union, however, helped formalize these long-standing views.

⁵ For the sake of accuracy I should point out that France was not officially Catholic during the French Revolution, although Catholicism was reinstated, albeit with diminished authority, by Napoleon (see Atkin and Tallet).

⁶ Napoleon gained control by way of a coup d'état in 1799 when he became First Consul of the French First Republic. In 1805 he was declared Emperor of France, a position he retained until June, 1815 (with the exception of a brief period in 1814-15)

⁷ Gaskell writes from the vantage point of seventy years after these events, and is critical of these practises, as, indeed, many were also during the Napoleonic Wars.

more in common than, for example, the Scottish Highlanders (Colley 14-15).⁸ Notwithstanding that regional differences continued to simmer, at least to some extent, in Scotland during the eighteenth century, a greater cultural fusion began during this period, and helps explain the ongoing influence of the Scottish Enlightenment in England into the nineteenth century, despite, as I shall argue shortly, a preponderant Englishness emerging in that period.

This period of a dominant Britishness did not, however, preclude ongoing “organic attachments” to England, Wales, or Scotland (Colley 18). The idea of Englishness was still current in the eighteenth century, albeit dimmed because of the urgent challenges facing Britain in this period in the intense struggle with France. Notwithstanding these conflicts with France, however, the ethnic English were also defining themselves against, for example, Celtic Britons, a concept picked up with greater virulence in the nineteenth century. Additionally, a great many in England resented changes in vocabulary-usage, from “English” to “British” and “England” to “Great Britain” (Colley 13), a point reflected in John Free’s complaints in *Seasonable Reflections upon the Importance of the Name of England* (1755), its sub-title revealing Free’s view that “the disuse of that name hath . . . hurt and diminished the strength . . . of our native country.”⁹ Moreover, the threat posed by the Scots, especially for those living in England’s northern parts, continued, the Jacobite uprisings of 1715 and 1745 having given justification to these claims of imminent danger. Furthermore, England’s population size (in 1801, about 60% of Britain’s population), the

⁸ Especially the elite amongst the Scottish Lowlanders cultivated Englishness in the eighteenth century by adopting the English language in preference to Scottish Gaelic, and educating their sons at English public schools and universities (Wheeler 192, 197).

⁹ See *Seasonable Reflections upon the Importance of the Name of England: Wherein it is Enquired; Whether the Disuse of that Name, and Likewise that of English-man, Among Those, who are of English Extraction Hath not Sensibly Hurt and Diminished the Strength, Influence, and Extent of our Native Country* by John Free, published 1755.

vast wealth from industrial improvements and trade generated within England, and the fact that Britain's centre, London, was also England's capital city, all meant that the concept of England would not disappear quietly after the Act of Union of 1707. Englishness thus existed side by side with Britishness, albeit with diminished impact, during the eighteenth century.

What, however, is Englishness, and how is it similar to, but also different from, British national identity? Judy Giles and Tim Middleton helpfully define Englishness as "a nexus of values, beliefs and attitudes which are offered as unique to England and to those who identify as, or wish to identify as, English" (5). That is, Englishness posits certain characteristics as unique to England in order to determine who may (and may not) be denoted as English. It differentiates between, and determines who is in, the 'in group' and the 'out-group.'

Yet how, by whom, and in what circumstances is Englishness produced? I address these questions in this thesis, and argue that Gaskell had a vision for a more egalitarian Englishness; that is, a flatter social system with a larger variety of English men and women in the 'in group. I also point out, however, that while Gaskell interrogates various elements of the hegemonic Englishness of her period, and makes inroads in drawing people of differing social groupings in to an inclusive Englishness, her Englishness is also ambivalent and even, at times, contradictory. She continues to uphold one of the main tenets of mainstream Englishness, a middle-class bias, so that, for Gaskell, the entry requirement into the 'in group' (by, for example, the working classes) is middle-class acculturation. I argue in this thesis that Gaskell's writings suggest both the benefits and also the limitations of this liberal perspective. This ambiguity within Gaskell's writing can be seen, for example, in a comment made in a letter to her daughter, Marianne, where Gaskell writes: "*Don't* call Shifts Chemises. Take the pretty simple *English* word whenever you can. As Mrs Davenport said

the other day 'It is only Washerwomen who call Shifts "chemises" now'" (*Letters* 181). The linking of un-Englishness (employing French nouns in English conversation) and working-class otherness in this quote reveals something that is critically important in a discussion of Englishness in Gaskell's writing. While a novel such as *Mary Barton* displays definite sympathy for Manchester's working classes and a desire for them to be included in notions of Englishness, at the same time, as is explored in this thesis, Gaskell's route for working class movement into Englishness is via (English) middle-class conventions. To become one of *us*, as Gaskell sees it, the working classes need to somehow shed their working class otherness which (in Gaskell's mind) seems to be more akin to French than English identity.

Nineteenth Century: Preponderant Englishness

Critical historical events have frequently (re)defined what it means to be English, and also, at times, British. Pivotal moments prior to the nineteenth century included, for example, King Alfred's defence of England against Viking attacks in the ninth century; the English Reformation in the sixteenth century; the English Civil War (1642-49); and the Revolution of 1688. The (Glorious) Revolution of 1688, for example, coming after a half-century of debate about religious and parliamentary freedom, led to (re)definitions of Englishness in terms of England's Protestant identity and limited government.¹⁰ While these particular notions of

¹⁰ Despite being a basic tenet of Britishness, the Anglican Church is very much an English denomination. The link between Englishness and the established church has a long history (Ackroyd xx, Elton 2, Kumar 46, Sauer, 144), and, by the nineteenth century, Englishness was firmly fixed on notions of the moral superiority of the English national character defined largely by the Anglican Church (Ackroyd xx, Colley 368, Dodd 3, Elton 226, Hastings 38). Geoffrey Elton notes that "the English . . . emerged from the Middle Ages very definitely as a nation, self-consciously aware of that identity and always ready to assert it" (111), and comments further that their being better off than people elsewhere was linked in English minds to the "special beneficence of a God who valued the English" (112). Moreover, these religious roots in the concept of Englishness were part of the reason for the success of the

Englishness at the end of the seventeenth century were also absorbed by a more general Britishness during the wars with France in the eighteenth century, they remained part of an Englishness that continued into the nineteenth century.

As England settled into a new set of peacetime conditions after the Napoleonic Wars, the English responded to various challenges posed by the changing socio-political milieu by shifting towards a more dominant Englishness. Indeed, it is claimed, once the French threat diminished, Englishness developed at a faster rate than Britishness (Schmitt 15-16). Britishness was still seen generally by the English in terms of an 'objective' geographical and political demarcation, but Englishness was the more aggressive of the two, socially constructed in reaction to a rapidly changing English cultural landscape (Colls, *Identity* 377; Lucas, *England* 3). Moreover, there is validity to the claim that Englishness and Britishness were often seen in this period, in English minds at least, as interchangeable synonyms, but with Englishness implicitly dominant.¹¹ English histories, for example Thomas Babington Macaulay's best-selling *History of England* (1849), simply place any references to Britain within the context of English history and portray the other parts of the British Isles as "provincial backwaters" existing in the shadow of their superior English 'sister' (Barczewski 48-9): "In extent Scotland and Ireland were nearly equal to each other, and were together nearly equal to England, but were much less thickly peopled than England, and were very far behind England in wealth and civilization" (Macaulay 51).

In the nineteenth century, Englishness was defined against the backdrop of modernity – most particularly those changes resulting from the Industrial Revolution and

Reformation in England which resulted in England's break with Catholicism (from then on thought of as a foreign and un-English faith) and the establishment of the Anglican Church, significantly known as the Church of *England* (Ackroyd xx).

¹¹ Scholars who argue the interchangeability of Englishness and Britishness in the nineteenth century include Boyce (234), Hall (*Cultural Identities* 29), Pittock (42), and Vaughan (365).

becoming increasingly evident after the Napoleonic Wars – which brought a variety of concepts undergirding English identity into the spotlight. Angelia Poon writes that in “the nineteenth century, competing and complementary meanings of Englishness constellated variously around race/whiteness, moral feeling, righteous behaviour, God-fearing Christianity, shared heritage, and beliefs in imperial greatness” (6). I would add that Englishness was also associated with industrial change (and the historical nostalgia that accompanied that), economic liberalism, political reform, and scientific debate, all of which resulted in a series of ‘conversations’ about what it meant to be English. These ‘conversations’ ranged, for example, from Robert Knox’s views that the British Celts were a threat to English civilization, to *The Times*’ editorial perspective in 1852 of the English as “the superior race” (qtd. in Ross 90), to the cultivation of public school training of “moral and physical” English men (*The Times*, 1863, qtd. in Morris xxx).¹² Another type of ‘conversation’ took place over tea-cups, tea itself a social commodity that increasingly connoted Englishness in the nineteenth century, and, as I elaborate in chapter three, used by Gaskell to mediate social differences within her own construction of Englishness. Thus, while Gaskell herself did not define the term “Englishness,” she nevertheless participated in these ‘conversations’ by both interrogating the presumed Englishness of her period and adding her own contributions to it by presenting a more inclusive Englishness.

By the time Gaskell published *Mary Barton*, her first novel, more than thirty years after Napoleon’s defeat at Waterloo, the balance of the “national crisis” had shifted from outside forces (the French) to threats within Britain itself, which resulted in a new sense of

¹²Arthur Aspinall describes *The Times* as “[that] mouthpiece of public opinion . . . and most influential of [nineteenth century] newspapers” (312-13).

Englishness emerging in this period.¹³ There were debates, for example, about the implications of including (in the main, Celtic and Catholic) Ireland in the United Kingdom of Great Britain in 1801; such as, how to proceed with the Irishman Daniel O’Connell’s election to the British House of Commons in 1828 (as a Catholic, O’Connell refused to sign the Oath of Supremacy, an event that led to the Catholic Emancipation Act in 1829). As I discuss in chapter two, there were also differences of opinion about the increasing parameters of the British Empire. Moreover, the immense social changes of this period resulted in a growing desire for new freedoms, a central subject in Gaskell’s writing. Some of these changes were reflected in law reforms such as the Reform Act 1832, the 1833 Factory Act, and the repeal of the Corn Laws (1846), and others in organised dissent such as the Chartist Movement (1838-1848). Stephanie Barczewski writes of this period:

At home, another set of issues was raised by the increasingly loud demands of an ever-greater proportion of the British populace for full rights of citizenship. 'Freedom', as opposed to French tyranny and absolutism, had throughout the eighteenth century been a fundamental component of British patriotism. But if everyone could agree that the British were relatively more free than the French, they could not agree on how absolutely free they should be. Did that freedom, defined in its political form as the right to vote, extend to people of all classes? To women? . . . The maintenance of British national identity in the face of these new social, political and cultural conditions was no simple matter. (5)

¹³ This is not to say that all international conflict was over; other hostilities continued over the course of the nineteenth century. With the French threat, located mainly just across the English Channel, diminished, the location of conflict was now consistently further away (for example, in Spain and Russia), and, perhaps with the exception of the Crimean War, did not require an all-out national effort as the Napoleonic Wars had done.

Barczewski adds that these new social issues after the Napoleonic Wars led to a social fragility that resulted in “a far more exclusive 'Englishness,' which demanded that its constituents adhere to certain ostensibly objective standards” (6). Thus, instead of focusing mainly on the ‘other’ living across the English Channel, attention seems to have been increasingly fixed on those within England itself who did not fit these “objective standards” and were thus excluded from hegemonic constructions of Englishness.

“Standards” privileged in this period included those of being middle-class, manly, free, white, and Anglican, elements partly reflected in a leading article in *The Times* in 1861: “We fall back on the sentiments and ideas of our youth – independence, national and personal heroism . . . We care . . . for the beginnings of our race and language . . .” (qtd. in Morris xxviii). Mixed into these sentiments were notions of physical prowess and moral vigour, an ideal promoted by the British public schools such as Rugby, and summed up in the term ‘Muscular Christianity.’ In 1863 *The Times* described a ‘typical’ Englishman as “able to ride, to shoot, to fish, and to play at cricket . . . There is much more than what we may commonly understand by intellectual powers involved in the education of the English public man. It gives them moral and physical health” (qtd. in Morris xxx).

Moreover, nostalgic constructions of a presumed glorious past, in the face of increasing social changes, were also emphasised in this period. This was seen, for example, in the ongoing focus on the English landscape garden, already a cultural marker during the Tudor period (1485-1603), and denoted in Jane Austen’s *Emma* as “English verdure, English culture, English comfort” (355) as the ‘proper’ setting for Englishness.¹⁴ This nostalgia also

¹⁴ The cultural value of landscaped gardens and parkland can be traced at least as far back as the Tudor period. Henry VIII’s gardens at, for example, Hampton Court are a case in point. Hampton Court was remodelled to some extent in the nineteenth century by Joseph Paxton. See Quest-Ritson’s *The English Garden: A Social History*.

manifested itself in the reconstruction of Elizabethan gardens, for example at Montacute in the 1840s, at Hatfield in 1841, and at Packwood in the 1850s (Quest-Ritson, 15). Moreover, these nostalgic expressions of Englishness also privileged certain historical periods and persons. In Thomas Carlyle's speech, "The Hero as Poet," for example, delivered in 1840, he describes William Shakespeare as the greatest "Englishman we ever made" (*Heroes* 96), and implies that this "ornament to our English household" (*Heroes* 96) was not just the product of a particular age, but someone whose participation in England's "glorious Elizabethan Era" (Carlyle, *Heroes* 87) continued to rub off on the idea of Englishness even into the nineteenth century.

Finally, the writers of this period frequently assumed that the increasing pressure on England's class system, caused in part by social changes during the Industrial Revolution, posed a long-term threat to national stability and, hence, popular notions of Englishness (Kalliney 36).¹⁵ Matthew Arnold, for example, in his essay "Culture and Anarchy" (1869), writes about the "the tendency to anarchy which seems to be threatening us" (67):

For a long time, as I have said, the strong feudal habits of subordination and deference continued to tell upon the working-class. The modern spirit has now almost entirely dissolved those habits, and the anarchical tendency of our worship of freedom in and for itself, of our superstitious faith, as I say, in machinery . . . is becoming very manifest. More and more . . . [the working classes], all over the country, are beginning to assert and put in practice an Englishman's right to do what he likes; his right to march where he likes, meet

¹⁵ These include novelists such as Charles Dickens, Benjamin Disraeli, Elizabeth Gaskell, William Makepeace Thackeray, and Thomas Hardy, and other writers, including Thomas Carlyle, John Ruskin, Matthew Arnold, Friedrich Engels, Cecil Rhodes, Henry Mayhew, William Morris, and William Booth (Kalliney 36).

where he likes, enter where he likes, hoot as he likes, threaten as he likes, smash as he likes. All this, I say, tends to anarchy. (58)

Arnold's solution lay with "culture"; specifically, training one's mind by imbibing a body of knowledge as an antidote to this threatened anarchy in order to maintain a 'civilized' Englishness.¹⁶ Another writer, Benjamin Disraeli, portrays in *Sybil; or, The Two Nations* (1845) two Englands within England that simply never meet up; there is an intractable cultural gap between the rich and the poor, "between whom there is no intercourse and no sympathy; who are as ignorant of each other's habits, thoughts, and feelings, as if they were dwellers in different zones, or inhabitants of different planets" (149). Charles Dickens, on the other hand, interrogates hegemonic constructs of Englishness by including several Englands within a novel such as *Bleak House* that at some point collide, meeting head-on. According to David Gervais this was part of Dickens' appeal: "Part of [the novel's] interest (and its 'romantic side'), for its first readers, must have been that these Englands very rarely collided in their own lives" (*Literary Englands* 2).

Gaskell's approach to Englishness, however, differs from writers such as Disraeli and Dickens. She, too, writes about two separate nations within England, but she does not keep them apart (as does Disraeli), or make them collide (as in Dickens' case). Rather, while her novels implicitly recognise that more than one England exists, Gaskell's writing seeks to unify them, to reconcile these Englands, and she does so by promoting the acculturation of the upper and lower spectrums of England's class system into her middle-class version of Englishness. Thus, to return to my earlier point that Englishness differentiates between, and

¹⁶ I return to this topic of 'civilizing' the working-classes through education in chapter four (on masculinity) where I discuss the influences of public schooling (and principals, such as Matthew Arnold's father, Thomas Arnold, at Rugby School) and the Christian Socialist Movement. These were important cultural contexts for Gaskell's constructions of Englishness.

determines who is in, the 'in group' and the 'out group,' Gaskell interrogates her period's established definitions of who is 'in' and who is 'other' and constructs a more democratic, egalitarian England in which all parts of the country participate in a single Englishness.

Gaskell's Englishness

I thus argue that, while Gaskell does weave hegemonic (white, male, middle-class) notions of Englishness into her writing, she also wrestles with the place of the 'other' within English society – for example, the working classes, women, 'un-masculine' men, unwed mothers, the *nouveau riche*, regional England – and she attempts to include them within her egalitarian version of Englishness. Phillip Dodd's observation that the histories of the working classes and of women, for example, were "buried out of sight of the 'national mind'" (3) is thus only partially correct. Gaskell is one writer who, using the medium of realist prose fiction, interrogates the 'official' Englishness of her period and gives a voice to those typically excluded from it.

Gaskell's contributions to nineteenth-century conversations about Englishness are unique for a number of reasons. Gaskell was a female writer, and she was also Unitarian. As a female writer in the mid-Victorian period she operated, to some extent, outside of hegemonic discourse, and in some ways, was barred from Englishness itself, in that, as a woman, she was excluded from England's political community, a fact formalized in the first Reform Act (1832), which clearly excluded women from the franchise (Hall, *Defining* 28-9). Being female *and* Unitarian, however, separates her from most other published English female writers of fiction in the nineteenth century and is, largely, the essence of her

difference from mainstream Englishness.¹⁷ As I stated earlier, the Anglican Church aligned itself with hegemonic Englishness in the nineteenth century. Gaskell's Unitarianism thus also placed her outside the religious pale, and had a marked influence on her inclusive, egalitarian notions of Englishness.¹⁸ Gaskell's attempt to build bridges between social groupings stemmed from an optimistic, Unitarian perspective that assumed peoples' inherent goodness. Unitarianism is an inclusive, flexible faith that does not enforce beliefs in creeds, but encourages non-dogmatic views of basic Christian tenets. Furthermore, it privileges rationality and scientific method, and, in the nineteenth century, also had more tolerant views regarding the roles of women. As is argued in this thesis, writing as a woman (and wife and mother) within this religious framework gave Gaskell greater freedom to write, particularly on unorthodox topics, thereby contributing to her particular constructions of Englishness. Gaskell's unorthodoxy is already apparent in her range of characters from within the established church, not just devout Lois Barclay in "Lois the Witch," but also Sylvia in *Sylvia's Lovers* (1863), who "rarely attends church" (SL 379), and Mr. Hale in *North and South* who questions Anglican orthodoxy, as well as numerous characters from various dissenting backgrounds: Quakers, Catholics, Puritans, and Unitarians. In presenting a complex religious society, Gaskell contests a historically constructed and hegemonic Anglican Englishness.

Gaskell's Englishness is generally implicit rather than explicit, unstated, centring around the ordinary – drinking cups of tea, tending rose gardens, keeping up appearances of

¹⁷ There were other female writers in Gaskell's period who were Unitarian (or sympathetic to Unitarianism), such as (Scottish) Joanna Baillie, and writers of (mainly) non-fiction works such as Lucy Aikin and Harriet Martineau, but there were no English, Unitarian female writers of (largely) fiction works in the mid-nineteenth century. Hence Gaskell's unique position in this regard.

¹⁸ Unitarianism only became fully legal in Gaskell's lifetime, in the Doctrine of the Trinity Act in 1813, also known as the Unitarian Toleration Bill.

gentility, the daily grind of work (whether that be for the working-class factory mill-worker, the mill owner, the doctor, or the estate manager). She differs in this from a contemporary such as Friedrich Engels (Lucas, *Literature* 55-6). A crucial distinction between Engels' *Condition of the Working Class* (1844) and Gaskell's *Mary Barton* (1848), for example, is that the former is an angry account of the deprivations experienced by Manchester's working-class citizens, whereas *Mary Barton*, while also set in Manchester, includes glimpses of working-class *joie de vivre*: picnics, tea-parties, working-class song. Gaskell's perspective is in the first place religious rather than economic (Spencer 37); she thus writes that it is "wicked . . . to excite class against class" (*Letters* 67). Since, as a Unitarian, she assumes that an essential goodness unites humankind, her goal is to ameliorate divisions between the classes in order to bring them together. In this her purpose is not to overthrow the class system *per se* but to make it more bearable for the sum total of the English population, be they male or female, upper or lower class.

Gaskell's Englishness reveals a love for England's *English* population. It is striking that her fiction set within Great Britain but outside England's borders (for example in Wales) generally end in tragedy (Shelston, *Brief* 33).¹⁹ Similarly, her love for the English does not extend to, for example, the Irish. In a letter she writes that "the pure-bred Lancashire man is a right down fine fellow, – it is the admixture with Irish that pulls [the English working-man] down" (*Letters* 681), a view reflected in the negative portrayal of the Irish workers in *North and South* (1854-55). Moreover, while she questions some of the assumptions in nineteenth-century racial ideology in "An Accursed Race," she still implies that there is a

¹⁹ Fiction set in Wales includes "The Well of Pen-Morfa" (1850), "The Doom of the Griffiths" (1858), and the early chapters of *Ruth* (1853).

developmental gap between the English and their Celtic neighbours.²⁰ Gaskell also draws attention to England by depicting other countries as foreign and (frequently) distasteful. She demonstrates this, for example, in “The Shah’s English Gardener” (1852), an essay about an English gardener in nineteenth-century Persia. Outlined in this essay are the various defects within Persian culture, described as “a strange contrast to the regular, well-ordered comfort of [England]” (SEG 247). Gaskell’s primary interest is generally in what will advance *English* society, making it more inclusive for English people living within England.

Thesis in Context

Alan Shelston writes in his recent biography of Gaskell that it was only after Gaskell started receiving academic attention following the Second World War that her “image of an author whose iconic work represented a particular strand of retrogressive Englishness” (*Brief* 92) began to change.²¹ Gaskell has received particular attention from socialist and feminist critics, as well as an increasing number of new-historicist critics and biographers.²² Despite

²⁰ See chapter one for a fuller discussion of Gaskell’s comments on race in “An Accursed Race.”

²¹ Other scholars who also note this change include George H. Ford and Patsy Stoneman. See Ford’s *Victorian Fiction: a Second Guide to Research* (1978) and Stoneman’s *Elizabeth Gaskell* (2006).

²² To qualify the following list: my intention is not to box these scholars into a particular critical mode or to deny that some straddle more than one perspective, but to loosely categorise them in order to show the breadth of Gaskell scholarship. Critics whose perspective is (roughly speaking) socialist include: Louis Cazamian (1973), Mary Eagleton & David Pierce (1979), Arnold Kettle (1958), John Lucas (*Gaskell and Brotherhood* 1966, *Literature* 1977), and Raymond Williams (1983). Feminist critics include: Diana Archibald (2002), Francois Basch (1974), Gillian Beer (“Carlyle and Mary Barton” 1978), Felicia Bonaparte (1992), Robin Bailey Colby (1995), Deirdre d’Albertis (*Dissembling* 1997), Deirdre David (1981), Kate Flint (1995), Shirley Foster (*Victorian Women’s Fiction* 1985), Margaret Homans (1986), Patricia Ingham (1996), Patricia E. Johnson (2001), Elizabeth Langland (1995), Coral Lansbury (1975), Carol Martin (1983), Aina Rubenius (1950), Hilary Schor (1992), and Patsy Stoneman (2006). New historicist critics include: Cates Baldridge (1994), Rosemarie Bodenheimer (1988), Catherine Gallagher (1980, 1985), Linda K. Hughes and

the large volume of critical studies on Gaskell in the last half century, little has been done to address directly (and at length) the question of how Gaskell herself constructs Englishness in her writing.

Two scholars who have studied Englishness in Gaskell's writing are Julian Wolfreys and Pam Morris. Morris writes briefly on Englishness in her introduction to Gaskell's *Wives and Daughters*.²³ Wolfreys devotes a chapter to Englishness in Gaskell's writing in *Being English: Narratives, Idioms, and Performances of National Identity from Coleridge to Trollope*.²⁴ Wolfreys' project is a reaction to what he sees as the nostalgic homogenisation of Victorian "values" by late twentieth-century British Conservative governments. He writes: "My concern is precisely to counter such political narratives in the domestic scene with an alternative, fragmentary politics of national identity, as it comes to be represented and performed in fictional narratives of the nineteenth century" (3-4). He identifies multiple voices and viewpoints and competing political hegemonies in Gaskell's writing (95), and points out that Gaskell's consciousness of the "heterogeneous nature" (82) of Englishness informs her writing.²⁵ He does not, however, come down squarely on what Englishness is, but circles it within a Derridian paradigm, seeing it as "one more effect of practices and discourses which are themselves not fixed" (5). He therefore does not "construct a historical

Michael Lund (1999). Biographers include: J.A.V. Chapple and Arthur Pollard (1966), J.A.V. Chapple and J.G. Sharps (1980), John Chapple (*Portrait* 1980, *Early Years* 1997), John Chapple and Alan Shelston (2000), Shirley Foster (*Elizabeth Gaskell* 2002), Winifrid Gerin (1976), Graham Handley (2005), Annette B. Hopkins (1952), Alan Shelston (*Brief*, 2010), Jenny Uglow (1993), Ana Unsworth (1996).

²³ See the Penguin edition of *Wives and Daughters* (1996).

²⁴ Wolfreys focuses on Gaskell's "An Accursed Race," "Round the Sofa," and *Cousin Phillis*, also makes a number of comments about Englishness in *Cranford*, in a chapter in *Dickens to Hardy* (2007).

²⁵ Wolfreys makes this same point in *Dickens to Hardy 1837-1884*. Interacting with Gaskell's comment in "The Last Generation of England" Wolfreys notes that it is impossible to "classify" the details of Gaskell's Englishness (67).

context for the texts in question in the manner of [for example] New Historicism" (5). Pam Morris, on the other hand, while also acknowledging a plurality of voices in Gaskell's writing, does place it within its socio-historical milieu. She detects alternative, heterogeneous narratives, and notes that *Wives and Daughters* "articulates a divided consciousness in its representation of Englishness" (xxxii). She observes that one way Gaskell constructs Englishness is by setting up an opposition between France and England, in which England is portrayed as Protestant, rational, and masculine, whereas France is denoted as England's other: Roman Catholic, politically volatile, and feminine.

A scholar who would disagree with Morris on this point is Felicia Bonaparte. In *The Gypsy-Bachelor of Manchester: The Life of Mrs. Gaskell's Demon*, Bonaparte sees England in Gaskell's work as a metaphor for femininity, and France as signifying the masculine (70-72). Bonaparte writes: "Gaskell . . . thinks of France, the land of passion and in consequence of the demon, always as a male domain just as she thinks of England as female" (153).²⁶ I agree with Bonaparte that Gaskell strongly identified with the English, but I feel that Bonaparte separates Gaskell too much from a social context that, as Morris points out, associated masculinity with Englishness. Gaskell does not think in terms of either/or – that is, either England is masculine or England is feminine – but, rather, includes both male and female within her views of Englishness. She operates within a 'both/and' paradigm, in order to include the various sectors of English society.

Morris also notes a subtext in *Wives and Daughters* alongside the opposition between England and France, which problematises this construction of Englishness. She

²⁶ Bonaparte cites Gaskell's *The Life of Charlotte Bronte* to illustrate her point. She notes that Gaskell covers up Bronte's 'affair' in Belgium with Constantin Heger and presumes that this is because Gaskell was at pains to present Bronte as a chaste, moral English woman (235-38).

writes: “*Wives and Daughters* is undoubtedly part of the discursive project that constructed Englishness as a repressed, masculine imperialism, but the novel also reveals the cultural loss that project entailed; it may also be attempting to envision an alternative narrative to that of nationalism” (xxiii). I find Morris’s comments on Englishness in *Wives and Daughters* useful, but her comments are (necessarily) brief and limited to this one novel. Thus, while she makes a significant contribution, there is more to be said about Englishness in *Wives and Daughters* and in Gaskell’s writing more generally.

This thesis attempts that fuller understanding. Unlike Wolfreys, however, I approach the topic by placing Gaskell’s writing and her construction of Englishness firmly within its socio-historical milieu. I also differ from Bonaparte, who reads England as *metaphor* in Gaskell’s writing. I argue that, for Gaskell, England is primarily *literal*, a real place. I employ four main focal points here to show how Gaskell engages with hegemonic views of Englishness: racial ideologies; debates about imperial expansion; imperial trade (particularly in tea, cotton, and opium); and gender/masculinity. ‘Conversations’ about each of these topics in the nineteenth century contributed answers to a burning question of the period: “what are we English? Does anybody know?” (*The Times*, qtd. in Young, *Ethnicity* 177). In other words, who is in the ‘in group,’ and who is not? As I explore these topics I show how Gaskell engages with but doesn’t fully embrace the ‘official’ Englishness of her period.²⁷

I have chosen to explore these four topics rather than dealing with Gaskell’s works in chronological order because, while general patterns of progression can be detected in

²⁷ I realise that I have been selective in choosing these four topics and that other subjects are also relevant, such as a more detailed discussion on how regionalism and language/dialect intersect with Englishness and Gaskell in this period. Another pertinent topic could be Gaskell’s focus on morality and behaviour and how these contributed to certain notions of Englishness in her writing. While these other topics offer much of interest, and I refer to them where relevant, the topics I have chosen seem to me to offer the most for understanding what Gaskell is doing in her work.

Gaskell's writing,²⁸ there is little chronological change in her depictions of Englishness. Indeed, ambiguities in Gaskell's Englishness, already evident in her first novel, *Mary Barton*, continue until her final work, *Wives and Daughters*, making it difficult to detect a definite line of progression in her Englishness.²⁹ Thus, *Mary Barton*, a sympathetic account of the working classes, which shows Gaskell's concern for the 'other' in Englishness, also includes Gaskell's ambivalence towards the working classes in her demonization of (the working-class) John Barton. Moreover, equivocations in Gaskell's Englishness can still be seen in variations in her depiction of English men at large outside of England's spatial boundaries, in her final two works: Edward Holdsworth in *Cousin Phillis* (1863) is depicted as un-English, whereas Roger Hamley in *Wives and Daughters* (1864-5), who, like Holdsworth, also travels to far off places, is shown as eminently English.

My first chapter engages with the concept inherent in the Englishness of the first half of the nineteenth-century, namely, that to belong to the Saxon race was axiomatic to being English, and that English cultural superiority was, in turn, clearly linked to being Anglo-Saxon. By the 1860s, however, notions about 'pure' Saxon blood being the bedrock of Englishness were being debated, and Gaskell wrote within an intellectual context where scientific 'proof' was sought to answer these questions. As a Unitarian, she responded

²⁸ For example, some scholars identify differences between Gaskell's earlier writing, mainly published in Charles Dickens' *Household Words*, and her later works, published in the more upmarket *Cornhill Magazine*. See John Chapple and Alan Shelston in *Further Letters of Mrs Gaskell* (xix), and Joanne Shattock. Shattock writes: "[Gaskell] . . . moved on from the literature of social improvement to the literature of the middle classes in whose midst she felt herself located" (*Elizabeth Gaskell* 124).

²⁹ At the same time, some of Gaskell's more interesting examples of inclusiveness in her Englishness are in her earlier works. I have no doubt those public outcries about her earlier publications, such as *Mary Barton* and *Ruth*, played a part in her retreat into safer subjects. Uglow describes, for example, Gaskell's "heartache" when *Ruth* was published: "These first hostile blasts found Elizabeth shivering from a real 'Ruth fever' . . . Elizabeth had roused the lion and it roared around her" (337-38, 341).

positively to this new mode of scholarly investigation by interweaving various scientific preoccupations into her writing. She contributed to and used key aspects of the racial discourse of her period to engage with questions about race and Englishness, in which she challenged prevailing ideas about a 'pure' (and static) Anglo-Saxonism, and presented, instead, a progressive view of a social history evolving into a more egalitarian Englishness.

English cultural superiority was also assumed by those who claimed England's 'right' to an empire, a concept Gaskell embraced as 'natural' but also challenged to some extent. I discuss in chapter two how Gaskell distances herself from empire, especially in her later fiction, such as *Lois the Witch* and *Cousin Phillis*. Yet, as I also discuss in chapter three, England (and particularly London) was the heart of the British Empire and, as the nineteenth century progressed, it became increasingly difficult to separate the concepts of England, Britain, and the imperial activities of the British Empire, concepts which English minds (including Gaskells') tended to fuse. In many ways the British Empire was English. Gaskell did, however, become increasingly insular, especially after the Indian Mutiny (1857), viewing the empire as a threatening appendage and favouring, instead, England's locale at 'home.'

In chapters three and four, I examine how the perspective that Gaskell's main love for England rather than the empire "out there" (CP 323) resulted in her primary focus being on social change within England so that excluded 'others' might be included in the Englishness of this period. In my discussion of the imperial products of tea, cotton, and opium (in chapter three) and masculinity (in chapter four), I foreground an ambiguity in Gaskell's Englishness, namely, that, while, on the one hand, she challenges the Englishness of her period, particularly from a Unitarian and female perspective, at the same time she upholds one of its main tenets, a middle-class bias. In these chapters I argue that Gaskell

had a peculiar variation of this: she demonstrates an optimistic view of gradual (evolutionary) change within English society in which middle-class values and behaviour (and hence Englishness) can be learned and achieved by a wider stratum of the English population. In seeking to ameliorate divisions within her society, to increase the size of the 'in group' of Englishness, she advocates that the way to do this is by assimilating middle-class behaviour and habits.

I have primarily used Gaskell's novels and novellas to explore how she constructs Englishness.³⁰ This is not meant to suggest that her short stories, essays, and letters are insignificant. Rather, I made this choice simply because her novels provide more scope for exploring, in depth, Gaskell's engagement with Englishness and English identity. As Catherine Stimpson writes, "[a]s a genre . . . the novel resists rigidities . . . is like a stadium in which several beliefs and aesthetic ideologies collide" (vii).³¹ Similarly, in a discussion about the relationship between the novel-genre and representations of Englishness, Patrick Parrinder also suggests that novels frequently disrupt hegemonic perspectives (7). Gaskell, too, used the novel genre to resist prevailing views on Englishness in her period. While on the one hand her narratives appear to maintain, at least to some extent, the hegemonic discourse of her period, upon closer scrutiny there are factors in her writing such as narrative perspective, plot development, and particularly problematic characters that undermine mid-nineteenth-century orthodoxies.

³⁰ Gaskell's novels are: *Mary Barton* (1848), *Ruth* (1853), *Cranford* (1853), *North and South* (1855), *Sylvia's Lovers* (1863), and *Wives and Daughters* (1864-66). Her novellas are: *The Moorland Cottage* (1850), *Lois the Witch* (1859), *My Lady Ludlow* (1858), and *Cousin Phillis* (1863).

³¹ See John Lucas, Elizabeth Langland (*Telling Tales*), Patrick Parrinder, and Catherine Stimpson.

Moreover, and at the risk of stating the obvious, I selected those texts that significantly contribute to understanding Englishness in Gaskell because they deal most explicitly with issues of English identity.³² For example, “An Accursed Race” is helpful when discussing the interrelation between racial ideology and Gaskell’s Englishness in chapter one; and the tensions between the northern (cotton) trade and southern gentility in *North and South* make this novel a fruitful entry point into discussions in chapter three on the effect the imprint of imperial trade had on notions of Englishness in the nineteenth century and, more specifically, in Gaskell’s writing. Finally, I focus mainly on Gaskell’s realist fiction and largely ignore her Gothic short stories, in part because social realism characterizes the majority of Gaskell’s writing (and all of her novels),³³ and also because it conveys the ‘ordinary’ that is so closely bound up in Gaskell’s portrayal of Englishness.³⁴ Gaskell uses the method of realist fiction to give a “voice” to ordinary people (Pike 16), and writes about what she observes in real life in England to present an ideal: an egalitarian Englishness.

³² As a point of clarification: due to space constraints, my treatment of Gaskell’s works is not exhaustive, but does, I trust, sufficiently support my argument.

³³ A possible exception is *Lois the Witch* (1859) which Laura Kranzler included in the Penguin Classics edition of Gaskell’s *Gothic Tales* (2001). There is a case for linking Englishness and gothic fiction as can be seen in Cannon Schmitt’s *Alien Nation: Nineteenth Century Gothic Fictions and English Nationality* (1997). Schmitt, however, does not use any of Gaskell’s gothic work in his analyses of nineteenth century fiction.

³⁴ See, for example, *Wives and Daughters* with its significant sub-title “An Everyday Story.”

Chapter One

All is Race: Organising Answers to Questions of Race

Race is a problematic term to use in a discussion of Englishness in the nineteenth century; its meaning was not universally agreed upon and, moreover, changed during the course of the nineteenth century (Lorimer, *Race* 14).³⁵ As a starting point it can be said, however, that, generally, race was understood in the nineteenth century in relation to biology, blood-lines, and hereditary descent, and “became *the* common principle of academic knowledge” (Young, *Colonial Desire* 93). Robert Knox, for example, a Scottish anthropologist, wrote in *The Races of Men* (1850) that “Race is everything: literature, science, art – in a word, civilization, depends on it” (7). For Knox, and those who thought like him, biology (race) determined a nation’s intellectual and cultural existence, and consequently, they privileged especially the Anglo-Saxon race in England which, they felt, had progressed socially at a faster rate than other races. Thomas Arnold, headmaster at Rugby School, for example, held up the Anglo-Saxons as culturally superior in his *Inaugural Lecture on the Study of Modern History* in 1842 (Lorimer 14). Knox was another who distinguished not only between peoples with different skin colours, but also between what he saw as different kinds of Europeans, especially the two main European groups identified within England at this time, Saxons and Celts. He wrote that race refers not only to those in “distant countries; Negroes and Hottentots, Red Indians and savages . . . but . . . European races differ from each other as widely as the Negro does from the Bushman” (39). Similarly, in Benjamin Disraeli’s novel,

³⁵ I elaborate on this point later in this chapter. On debates surrounding questions about race, see *Victorian Attitudes to Race* by Christine Bolt; *The Victorians and Race*, edited by Shearer West; and *The Complexion of Race* by Roxanne Wheeler.

Tancred (1847), Sidonia explains that “England flourishes” because of its “Saxon race . . . All is race; there is no other truth” (303).³⁶ Disraeli also said to the House of Commons in 1849: “Race implies difference, difference implies superiority, and superiority leads to predominance” (qtd. in Heathorn 90). For Arnold, Knox, Disraeli, and others of their milieu, belonging to the Saxon race was axiomatic to being English, and English cultural superiority was, in turn, clearly linked to being Anglo-Saxon.

At the same time, as the nineteenth century progressed, questions were asked which inevitably dented England’s pride in its racial origins. In 1868 *The Anthropological Review*, for example, recorded the following:

Those who pride themselves on the unsullied racial purity and invincible character of the Conventional Briton, will receive a severe shock . . . on becoming acquainted with the history of England . . . What are we English? Does anyone know? . . . We had got it so comfortably settled that we were a Germanic, or Teutonic, or Saxon people. (257-58)

Thus, by the 1860s notions about ‘pure’ Saxon blood being the bedrock of Englishness were being debated. Gaskell wrote within this “intellectual atmosphere” where scientific ‘proof’ was sought to answer these questions (Flint 9). As a Unitarian, she responded positively to this new mode of scholarly investigation by interweaving various scientific preoccupations in to her writing.³⁷ Indeed, Francis O’Gorman writes, helpfully, that “literature and science, once thought to be two separate and oppositional activities [were] fruitfully interrelated

³⁶ Of course, Disraeli himself occupies an anomalous position, being not only English but also of Jewish descent.

³⁷ As I noted in my Introduction, the Unitarians privileged rationalism and scientific method. They were among the first in England, for example, who adopted liberal theology, especially that of German theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher, favouring an intellectual approach to religion and discarding its ‘mystery.’ Unitarians also, then, readily welcomed scientific answers to anthropological questions.

practices [working together in] articulating and helping produce the culture from which they emerged” (230). In this context of science and literature working together to produce culture, Gaskell wrote prose fiction, a peculiarly powerful mode of discourse, well suited for developing answers to questions about national identity and what it meant to be English (Parrinder 21), and, as a Unitarian, she exhibited a willingness to engage with scientific discourse in order to use it to advocate a more inclusive Englishness.

In this chapter, I start by examining Gaskell’s engagement with questions of race and national identity, placing her work in its historical framework as contemporaneous with Darwin’s development of his theories of evolution. I will approach this subject by looking at three inter-related topics applied to understandings about race in the nineteenth century: Scottish Enlightenment theories about civilization, historical accounts focusing on England’s Saxon roots, and developments in scientific theory which, in many respects, helped validate Scottish Enlightenment and historical theories in the nineteenth century. I then turn to Gaskell’s deployment of race and racial theory in her fiction as well as in a particularly significant essay, “An Accursed Race.” Gaskell’s discussion of the notoriously shunned “race” of *cagots* in northern France in this essay indicates the extent to which she refused simply to accept contemporary notions of Anglo-Saxon superiority. This refusal further informs Gaskell’s work in two novels particularly concerned with race, bloodlines, and family history, *North and South* and *Wives and Daughters*. In these novels, Gaskell draws on the then-recent Darwinian theories of evolution to present a version of Englishness that embraces social change as presented by Darwin and others of her milieu, the ‘natural’ progression of the races of humankind to higher levels of morality and civilization, in order to optimistically present a more egalitarian, democratic form of Englishness.

Gaskell's Intellectual Context

Before examining Gaskell's engagement with race, it is relevant to ask whether Gaskell, as a woman and a writer of fiction in Victorian England, inhabited the personal, educational, and intellectual context to enable her to write authoritatively about race and Englishness, particularly since it was popularly seen in the nineteenth century through the largely masculine lenses of Scottish Enlightenment theories, historical accounts, and scientific development. That is, was she sufficiently qualified to write about this topic? After all, Gaskell herself wrote self-deprecatingly in the preface to her first novel, "I know nothing of Political Economy, or the theories of trade" (MB 4), and said she knew "nothing [about] Anti-Slavery" (*Letters* 490) or geography (*Letters* 519), and was neither "scientific nor mechanical" (*Letters* 159). Perhaps Gaskell claimed this (feminine) 'ignorance' in order to conform to widely accepted views and please her reading public. She voiced similar views in a personal letter to her (then) seventeen-year-old daughter, Marianne, commenting sharply, "Seriously, dear, you must not . . . form an opinion . . . That is one reason why so many people dislike that women should meddle with politics; they say it is a subject requiring long patient study of many branches of science; and a logical training which few women have had" (*Letters* 148). Despite these claims to the contrary, however, Gaskell was sufficiently qualified to engage with the pressing issues of her day, including that of race.

Edinburgh, the centre of the Scottish Enlightenment, is central in gaining an understanding of Gaskell's intellectual and scientific context, not only in relation to Gaskell herself, but also to those with whom she interacted, not least her father, William Stevenson. Stevenson lived in Edinburgh at the turn of the century, where he was one of the first contributors to the liberal *Edinburgh Review* (Chapple, *Early Years* 70), a journal whose "talent . . . spirit . . . writing . . . [and] independence were all new" (Uglow 10). Anna

Unsworth describes Edinburgh in the latter eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries as “a centre of dissenting intellectual society, revolving round the university and various ladies who held ‘evenings’” (16), one of these ladies being Mrs. Eliza Fletcher (later, a friend of Elizabeth Gaskell's), whose *salon* at the turn of the nineteenth century attracted many free thinkers, including the young William Stevenson. Thus, one of Elizabeth's first tutors in dissenting thought was her father, who wrote in the *Westminster Review* in 1826 that women and men ought to be seen as intellectual equals:

Women, therefore, ought to discountenance every kind of treatment and behaviour which, proceeding on the supposition that they are helpless, dependent and frivolous in their thought and pursuits renders them so, and bestow their approbation only on those men who regard and trust them as equal to themselves in their capacity for knowledge and usefulness. (qtd. in Uglow 41)

Since Elizabeth did not live with Stevenson after the death of her mother when Elizabeth was just over a year old, most of this tutelage would have occurred during her annual visits to her father's family after he remarried when she was four, and in letters they exchanged. One extant letter written by Stevenson to his daughter (presumably in 1827) gives credence to the view that their exchanges were on an intellectual level. In it he exhorts her to attend to her lessons, and includes a number of journals for her to read (Chapple, *Early Years* 286-87). Moreover, Elizabeth lived in her father's home for the final two years of his life after she completed her formal schooling, and during this time she would have been further exposed to his ideas about female intellectual equality with males.

Having been first taught at home, largely by her foster mother (Hannah Lumb, née Holland) and various uncles and aunts, Elizabeth was sent at the age of eleven to a boarding

school run by the Unitarian Byerley sisters, which she attended for five years. This was an unusual decision since Gaskell's hometown, Knutsford, had a Young Ladies' Seminary, the standard kind of schooling for girls of Elizabeth's social standing at that time (Unsworth 15, Uglow 33). Perhaps this decision was influenced by the fact that these local seminaries were staffed by poorly educated teachers who had little knowledge about either the content or pedagogy of teaching. In contrast, the Byerley sisters were well educated, offering education of exceptional quality for girls at that time (Unsworth 15).³⁸ After completing her schooling with the Byerley sisters and after an interval of two years, during which Elizabeth nursed her father, she continued her education in Newcastle at the home of the Unitarian Reverend William Turner, a distant relative through her Holland relations, and a respected scholar in scientific ideas, well versed in evolutionary theories, who tutored students destined for the Scottish universities (Henson, *'Condition-of-England' Debate* 30).³⁹ It was arranged that Elizabeth would spend two winters with him, but with the outbreak of cholera in her second winter there Elizabeth was sent to Edinburgh instead in 1830-31.

Elizabeth would have received ready acceptance into Edinburgh's "brilliant society" through her family connections (Uglow 64). This first visit to Edinburgh coincided with the excitement surrounding George Combe's theories of phrenology, which Elizabeth studied but rejected. She commented sarcastically, albeit light-heartedly, in a letter dated 31 August, 1831 to a friend, Harriet Carr: "I have been studying Spurzheim on Phrenology . . . and intend to illuminate the world in the character of Lectures soon, so completely am I

³⁸ Other pupils at the school included Harriet Martineau's niece, Joseph Priestley's granddaughters, and Effie Grey (who later married John Ruskin) (Uglow 35).

³⁹ As John Chapple notes in his biographical account of Elizabeth Gaskell's early years, William Turner was "the moral and intellectual life of a major town" (*Early Years* 382). Turner established Newcastle's Natural Historical Society in 1824.

convinced of it" (*Further Letters* 8).⁴⁰ Elizabeth's grasp of Spurzheim's ideas indicates that she had received an excellent education which enabled her to engage with intellectual and scientific issues (such as phrenology was regarded at the time) in her visits to Edinburgh's *salons*. Perhaps Gaskell was recalling these visits when she wrote in *Round the Sofa* in 1859, a collection of short stories all set in an Edinburgh *salon*: "In came Edinburgh professors, Edinburgh beauties, and celebrities . . . [and] people did not in these parties meet to eat, but to talk and listen" (qtd. in Unsworth 16).⁴¹ Elizabeth's first visit to Edinburgh set the tone for a lifetime of attending gatherings where radical scientific ideas were disseminated in conversation. Unsworth concludes, "Here then Elizabeth enjoyed an informal 'finishing' and at twenty-one was a highly educated and polished young lady" (16).

Gaskell was personally acquainted with various naturalists. These included the Swiss-born Louis Agassiz, the French Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire, the Scottish botanist George J. Allman, and Charles Darwin. The interweaving of her life with each of these influential figures is evident from her letters. For example, in a letter written in 1864 to her close friend, Charles Eliot Norton, she indicates that she is writing it "at Dr Allman's (The Professor of Natural History [at Edinburgh University])" (*Letters* 724), and in it clearly indicates that she knows personally the American zoologist Dr. Daniel G. Elliot, and Louis Agassiz.⁴² In another letter she writes that her daughter, Meta, "is staying with some relations of mine at the present,

⁴⁰ Gaskell read the third edition (in English translation) of Spurzheim's *Phrenology* (Chapple, *Early Years* 390).

⁴¹ In chapter four I note the influence on Gaskell's writing of Madame Mohl's *salons* in Paris, twenty-five years later, in the mid 1850s.

⁴² Charles Eliot Norton (1827-1908) was an American intellectual considered by his contemporaries to be the most cultivated man in the United States (Dowling 245). Gaskell was writing *Wives and Daughters* during this stay at Dr Allman's. The stimulating context of Edinburgh for the writing of this novel has been given due consideration in Debrabant's article and I will elaborate on this later in this chapter.

and going for the Easter holidays to the Charles Darwins – he the naturalist who went round the world in the Beagle” (*Further Letters* 156).

Gaskell’s willingness to engage at these intellectual levels was also evident in 1855 when she wrote in a letter, “Scientific language is quite new to me; and yet some knowledge of it is required to understand all the papers” (Uglow 394). Further, in a letter to her daughter, Marianne, in this same year (1855), Gaskell refers to “talk[ing] zoologically” (*Letters* 332) at the Isidore Geoffroy Saint-Hilaires’ home in Paris. Isidore was the son of Etienne Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire (1772-1844), the eminent French naturalist mostly remembered in the twenty-first century for his intellectual influence on Charles Darwin, but recognized in his own right by Gaskell’s immediate (nineteenth-century) audience as an intellectual giant (Boiko 93).⁴³ Following in his father’s footsteps, Isidore was Professor of Zoology at the faculty of science at Paris. Gaskell’s discussions with a scientist such as Saint-Hilaire could easily have included latest developments in evolutionary thinking. Indeed, in 1855 Gaskell also published “An Accursed Race” which, as I discuss later, closely interacted with and contributed to debates concerning race at that time. In 1854, the *Westminster Review* published George Henry Lewes’ “Life and Doctrine of Geoffroy St. Hilaire,” which depicts Saint-Hilaire as a hero, in contrast to Cuvier, the anti-hero. Since Gaskell read the *Westminster Review*, it is highly likely that she also read this article (Boiko 94). Gaskell was thus an informed writer about naturalism and subsequently “endorses . . . the evolutionary view later called Darwinism” (Debrabant 16). Moreover, as Morris notes, Gaskell shows “a

⁴³ Etienne Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire was a colleague of Jean-Baptiste Lamarck (1744-1829) and Georges Cuvier (1769-1832), and was a friend of Robert Edmund Grant (1793-1874). While this earlier generation of naturalists had differences in thinking and approach, each contributed to developments in evolutionary theory in the nineteenth century and greatly influenced the next generation, including the younger Saint-Hilaire and Charles Darwin (1809-1882).

sound historical grasp [in *Wives and Daughters*] of Scotland, medicine, evolutionary science and exploration" (xxvii).

Evidence for Gaskell's participation in discussions about Darwin's theories can also be found in her correspondence with Charles Norton. While Gaskell's original letter is not extant, one wonders about Gaskell's part in this conversation with Norton in view of a comment made by him in his reply to her in 1859: "I wait to be convinced that I am nothing but a modified fish" (Whitehill 43). Did Gaskell rise to the challenge to convince Norton? We can but speculate, but she may have. I conclude this from her activities and contacts in this same period of 1859-60 when evolutionary debates were raging in England. The Gaskells had a long-standing connection with the British Association for the Advancement of Science. Several of Gaskell's letters refer to William Gaskell's active involvement in this association.⁴⁴ In June 1860 the British Association organised the famous debate between Bishop Wilberforce and Thomas Huxley. There are no records that the Gaskells were at this debate but, with the whole country abuzz about events such as these, they undoubtedly took part in conversations about evolution.

Humankind's origins also became part of ecclesiastical conflict at this time. While Darwin's writings were met with dismay by many devout Christians, Gaskell's Oxford friends, Benjamin Jowett and Mark Pattison, embraced Darwinism in their *Essays and Reviews* (1860), a series of theological essays which quickly became a best-seller. Gaskell noted that "everybody was talking about . . . 'Essays and Reviews'" (*Letters* 646) when she visited London in March, 1861. It is a reasonable assumption that these scientific debates were a topic of conversation at the meeting of the British Association in Manchester just half a year later in September 1861, organised, in part, by William Gaskell. The presence of

⁴⁴ See: *Letters* 154, 187, 188, 296, 645, 657.

scholars from Oxford, Cambridge, Europe, and America (Uglow 555), several of whom lodged at the Gaskells' home (*Letters* 666-67), lends credence to the idea that the latest scientific theories were discussed in the Gaskell home, discussions at which Elizabeth Gaskell was no doubt present.

A further important link between Gaskell and social evolutionary theories in this period was her acquaintance with Robert Chambers, Scottish author of the highly controversial *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* (1844). Chambers based his theories on those of Lamarck and posited the possibility of the evolution of the earth, thus serving as precursor for Darwin's *Origin of Species* published fifteen years later.⁴⁵ Again, it seems that biology and the 'natural' progress (evolution) of humanity had Gaskell's attention in 1855, the year that she wrote "An Accursed Race," since not only did these topics feature in the letters and visits referred to above, but also 1855 was the year that she met Chambers.⁴⁶

Various scholars have noted the effects *Vestiges* had on its audience and on the novel. James Secord, for example, writes:

Reading about evolutionary progress offered common questions to bridge divides that threatened the nation's stability. Controversies about class and gender – among many potentially explosive issues – could thereby be subsumed into discussions about nature's progress. Hence the significance of the *Vestiges* sensation for new literary forms such as popular science and the realist novel,

⁴⁵ Darwin acknowledges Chambers' importance in preparing his reading public for *Origin of Species* (58).

⁴⁶ Implied in Chambers' treatise is the (natural) progression of the social order, and Gaskell makes her own contribution to this social discussion in "An Accursed Race."

and its larger role in making 'the people' a central category of the industrial order. (5)

Unitarians, including William Gaskell, were receptive to the ideas recorded in *Vestiges*, not least because, as Secord observes, evolutionary ideas had the potential to “bridge divides” within England (Uglow 136), including those between Unitarianism and English society.⁴⁷ While Chambers did not admit to it, his authorship of *Vestiges* was stated in the widely circulated *Athenaeum* in 2 December, 1854, a possibility that others had also entertained since as early as 1845 (Secord 375, 396). Considering William Gaskell's interest in scientific innovation (Uglow 136), and that he read the *Athenaeum* (Uglow 560), it is likely that Elizabeth Gaskell knew of Chambers' authorship when she met him in 1855.

While there is no evidence that Gaskell read *Vestiges*, she did write in an undated letter (possibly in 1859) to Chambers that her enthusiastic reading of his *Domestic Annals of Scotland From the Reformation to the Revolution* (published in three volumes, 1859-61) “warms up all my Scottish blood” (*Letters* 547). Since Gaskell had no Scottish blood to speak of, this must be interpreted metaphorically, referring to the liberal traditions found in Scotland and to which Gaskell was so attracted. *Domestic Annals of Scotland* fitted easily into Scotland's radical ferment. While it is not a natural history (as is *Vestiges*), this social history has a similar purpose to Chambers' first book – that is, to show the inexorable (and socially necessary) evolutionary progress from, in his view, barbarism to civilization. Chambers' Preface begins with this sentence: “It has occurred to me that a chronicle of domestic matters in Scotland from the Reformation downwards – the period during which we see a progress towards the present state of things in this country – would be an

⁴⁷ As noted in my Introduction, Englishness went hand-in-hand with the Anglican Church (of England) in the mid-nineteenth century.

interesting and instructive book" (3). Not only does *Domestic Annals of Scotland* share a common evolutionary teleology with *Vestiges*, but these two books share a common focus on the centrality of common people. Chambers writes in his Preface that he aims to "detail . . . the series of occurrences beneath the region of history . . . how, on the whole, ordinary life looked" (*Annals* 3). Gaskell had a similar goal in "giving utterance to . . . this dumb people" (MB Preface). Like Chambers, she, too, wrote about "ordinary life," thus sharing with him this cultural work. This shared interest may have contributed to her enthusiastic response to Chambers' work.

Moreover, Chambers' comments in the introduction to *Domestic Annals of Scotland* about Scottish and Teutonic links may also have resonated with Gaskell. Chambers notes that "the bulk of the Scottish people were a branch of the great Teutonic race . . . Precisely the same people they were with the bulk of the English, and speaking essentially the same language" (*Annals* 1). Gaskell echoes this debunking of popular English claims in the nineteenth century concerning their exclusive Teutonic (Anglo-Saxon) roots in "An Accursed Race," in which she gives "utterance" to the suffering of the minority race, the Cagots, advocating the commonality of race, and positing the view that "their blood was just like that of other people" (AAR 219). I will explore this topic in more depth later in this chapter, but, for now, I want to emphasise that not only was Gaskell drawn to the evolutionary bias in Chambers' works (and its implications for racial theories and Englishness), but that she and Chambers advocated similar views about society, albeit in the differing discourses of history and literature.

Chambers' perspectives in *Domestic Annals* differed from common notions of Englishness of the mid-nineteenth century. While the moral superiority of the English national character was popularly supported by institutions such as the (Protestant) Anglican

Church, Chambers begins his book by presenting Protestantism's foundational period, the Reformation in the sixteenth century, as a time of superstition from which society needed to metamorphose and to evolve in order to progress to what was, in Chambers' view, the enlightened and rational age of the French Revolution in which the Christian religion had been philosophically debunked and Protestantism made redundant. Gaskell's attraction to this particular historical account, written by the author of *Vestiges*, is, in part, because she saw beyond commonly accepted notions of Protestant Englishness. Gaskell's vision included "ordinary life" irrespective of religious creed. Moreover, her enthusiasm for Chambers' work indicates her (Unitarian) belief that the tenets of evolutionary progress with their emphasis on rational thinking were the key to progressing to wider notions of Englishness.

Thus, the answer to the question posed at the beginning of this section, whether Gaskell inhabited the personal, educational, and intellectual context to enable her to engage with the racial discourse of her period, despite its being popularly seen in the nineteenth century through the largely masculine lenses of Scottish Enlightenment theories, historical accounts, and scientific development, is clearly in the affirmative. This context resulted in a particular version of Englishness in Gaskell's writing.

Scottish Enlightenment Civil Histories and English Racial Superiority⁴⁸

The civil histories,⁴⁹ written by leading figures of the Scottish Enlightenment during the eighteenth century, provided a conceptual framework for the English to explain their racial

⁴⁸ "Civil histories" attempted to explain the emergence of "civil" societies based on commerce (Buchan 178).

⁴⁹ Essays of this period include David Hume's *Essays Moral and Political* (1741-2), Adam Ferguson's *Essay on the History of Civil Society* (1767) and *Principles of Moral and Political Science* (1792), John Millar's *Origin of the Distinction of Ranks* (1771), Lord Monboddo's *Origin and Progress of Language* (1773), Lord Kames' *Six Sketches on the History of Man*

superiority (Wheeler 182).⁵⁰ This framework, which presupposes a belief in progress to the point of perfection, identifies four stages of civilization, each stage becoming more civil: primitive hunter-gatherer societies, shepherd based societies, agriculturally based societies, and, finally, commercial civilization (which mercantile England developed into at the advent of the Industrial Revolution) (Pittock 38, Wheeler 35). This theory synchronised with what the English already believed about themselves, their 'natural' superiority now clearly vindicated in their position on the top rung of this social hierarchy. John Millar, a Scottish philosopher and historian of that period, writes of "a natural progress from ignorance to knowledge, and from rude, to civilized manners" (qtd. in Wheeler 184). Thus, while he continued to hold the Scottish race in low regard, Samuel Johnson implicitly uses this framework to link the Scots' "natural progress" with the English. Writing about the advantage the Act of Union of 1707 gave the Scots, he states:

Till the Union made them acquainted with English manners, the culture of their lands was unskilful, and their domestick life unformed; their tables were coarse as the feasts of Eskimeaux, and the houses filthy as the cottages of Hottentots. Since they have known that their condition was capable of improvement, their progress in useful knowledge has been rapid and uniform . . . But they must be forever content to owe to the English that elegance and culture . . . (qtd. in Wheeler 207-208)

In English minds, England's commercial prosperity was an automatic outcome of its racial superiority while even material improvements in Scotland were only due to English influence.

(1774), Adam Smith's *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (1776), and James Dunbar's *Essays on the History of Mankind in Rude and Civilized Ages* (1780).

⁵⁰ This theory originates with Adam Smith in lectures given in 1762 (Pittock 38).

Related to this belief in Anglo-Saxon superiority was the common view that Saxons, of Teutonic (Germanic) origin, were predisposed to embrace attributes of freedom and liberty, vital for commercial success (Pittock 35,38)⁵¹ Luke Owen Pike wrote in 1866 in *The English and Their Origin*:

There are probably few educated Englishmen living who have not in their infancy been taught that the English nation is a nation of almost pure Teutonic blood, that its political constitution, its social customs, its internal prosperity, the success of its arms, and the number of its colonies have all followed necessarily upon the arrival, in three vessels, of certain German warriors under the command of Hengist and Horsa. (15)

This way of seeing the English people is reflected in the writing of other nineteenth-century thinkers. Thomas Hodgkin records that the Teutonic race was “the only race of Central Europe which had never bowed the knee to Rome” (80), John Lingard writes of gigantic, fierce Saxons (Floyd 188), and William Robertson of the “personal liberty and independence [of the Teutonic peoples]” (347). Moreover, Alexander Kinmont comments in *Twelve Lectures on the Natural History of Man and the Rise of Philosophy* (1839) on “that hereditary love of freedom and independence, which has distinguished the Anglo-Saxon race, – that *natural* stock of just and manly sentiment, on which the Christian religion has been engrafted, and expanded into a rational and moral civilization” (241). This leaning towards freedom and independence, then, was thought in nineteenth-century England to be a natural precursor to modernity and modern notions of Englishness. Gaskell's contemporary, Charles Knight writes approvingly in *The Popular History of England* (1856) of Anglo-Saxon settlement in England in the fifth century: “In short order, the newcomers from the

⁵¹ Germanic races were also known as Teutonic or Saxon.

continent came, saw, and conquered the island and its people. The event is generally depicted as something positive, and indeed necessary, for the progress of mankind, and something ultimately foreordained by the unique genius of the English identity” (3-4).

Gaskell alludes to this preoccupation with race and progress in *North and South* when the successful industrialist, John Thornton, boasts of his Teutonic origins and links race with commercial success and industrial society: “We are Teutonic up here in Darkshire . . . we do not look upon life as a time for enjoyment, but as a time for action and exertion . . . which makes us victorious” (NS 304). Thornton’s words reflect popular middle-class thinking in the nineteenth century that Teutonic blood inevitably led to commercial success and hence modernity. This rhetoric was used by the middle-classes to “impose alien values upon others” (Henson ‘*Condition-of-England*’ Debate 41), which included notions of Englishness that assumed Teutonic superiority. As I discuss in more detail below (as well as in relation to Thornton’s definition of *gentleman* in chapter four), one of Thornton’s roles in this novel is as a foil for Margaret Hale, whose thinking ‘needs’ to develop, also in relation to Englishness, so that she, too, embraces the value of commercialism necessary in an advanced English society. Margaret’s development, then, is to some extent a trope for England’s development out of the agricultural stage into the enlightened stage of commercial success (her family is from the rural south).

Moreover, in the nineteenth century, popular thought linked commercial success and luxury. Luxurious household items were considered evidence of higher-order mental exertion, indicating that society had progressed well beyond achieving its basic needs of food, clothing, and shelter (Wheeler 191). Already in 1760, an anonymous writer had recorded: “Every country must be luxurious before it can make any progress in human knowledge” (qtd. in Wheeler 191). Gaskell’s novels endorse this view, albeit with

reservations. They distinguish between the “elegant economy” (CD 8) of impoverished 'have-beens' and the varied luxuries enjoyed by the 'up and coming.' Chapter nine of *North and South*, for example, contrasts the Hale household, of upper-class heritage but now impoverished, with the home of the industrialist, John Thornton. Margaret Hale has to do the ironing, scour floors, and wash dishes, whereas there is no need for the wealthy Thornton's mother or sister to do these menial tasks (NS 70-1). Similarly, Gaskell portrays impending or actual poverty as an element in the lives of the ladies of *Cranford* (1853), Lady Ludlow's household in *My Lady Ludlow* (1858), and that of Squire Hamley in *Wives and Daughters* (1864-65). All of these characters prefer the old way of life (the agricultural stage of human development in the Enlightenment's four-stages theory), and resist society's progress towards a commercial, industrialized civilization. Through these characters, Gaskell hints that such people are misfits in a modern nineteenth-century context, behind the times in an England that is racially superior because of its prowess in commercial pursuits.

Gaskell also comments on the part that racial ideology played in nineteenth-century Englishness in “An Accursed Race.” In it she satirises the irrational persecution by the “pure race” of a racial minority, the Cagots, in France. She champions the Cagots by outlining their suffering over centuries, fuelled by the superstition and racial prejudice of the majority race. As I will argue below, Gaskell has a primary didactic purpose in this essay about *English* attitudes to race, but she also makes a secondary point, about the contrast between England and France. After all, it is *France* which has systematically persecuted “the miserable people called Cagots” (AAR 211). I am not convinced by Wolfreys’ argument that, by setting this narrative in France, Gaskell suggests the impossibility of separating England from widely-spread *European* racism towards minority races (85). As I discussed in my introduction, both English society generally and Gaskell’s fiction specifically tended to think

in terms of an English/French opposition, and “An Accursed Race” does not depart from this theme. Positioning French and English racial prejudice as interchangeable was not current in English thinking in the nineteenth century, and I do not believe that Gaskell, whose commentary is largely gentle and tentative in this account, as it is in most of her writing, would have raised this potentially inflammable topic. What is suggested in this narrative, instead, is that, while England may be racially prejudiced, France is even more so. That is, because of its advanced culture and civilization, England has moved at a faster rate than France in its racial attitudes.⁵² In this view Gaskell taps into deterministic theories of racial discourse that preceded and led to Darwin's *Origin of Species*. In these theories race was considered to be destiny; skin colour, skull shape, the place of one's birth, and family breeding and history, for example, determined one's potential for development, culture, and civilization (Stephan xix, Wheeler 33). Douglas A. Lorimer writes: “race . . . became, in the minds of its exponents, the most significant determinant of man's past, present and future” (14). Thus, while “An Accursed Race” makes a serious comment about racial prejudices within England, the statement at the outset of this narrative, “I do not think we have been so bad as our Continental [French] friends” bolsters England's ‘need’ to be superior over against the French. Implied is the view that, while English racial prejudice may need cleaning up somewhat, France, on the other hand, still lags behind England's superior development in this area.

⁵² Locating this prejudice abroad also allows Gaskell to distance herself as a writer from the actual location of her authorial comment: prejudice in *England*. Ever since the publication of *Mary Barton* was widely criticized, Gaskell was cautious about the potential fury of her readership.

On a didactic level, this narrative is, however, a comment on English racial prejudice. I agree with Wolfreys that it “performs . . . an internal critique of English prejudice” (83).⁵³ This is evident in a number of ways. First, the narrator is clearly English: “We have *our* prejudices in England” (AAR 211, emphasis mine). Moreover, the intended audience is also English, as can be seen in the use of the first-person pronoun “we.” The narrator continues: “if that assertion offends any of my readers, I will modify it: *we* have had our prejudices in England. *We* have tortured Jews, *we* have burnt Catholics and Protestants . . . I do not think *we* have been so bad as our Continental friends” (AAR 211). The narrative returns to this first-person pronoun “we” in its conclusion: “*we* are naturally shocked at discovering facts such as these” (AAR 228) before giving the “moral of this story” (AAR 228). This narrative is framed, then, by these comments by an English narrator to an English audience which is told to “look at home; there’s something to be done” (AAR 228).

The means Gaskell uses to teach her audience is to present a case of racial persecution in France. This narrative contrasts “those who boasted of pure blood” (AAR 211), a race never mentioned by name but referred to as free of the contamination of the inferior blood of the accursed race, and those alternatively referred to as accursed, oppressed, and unfortunate. The point is made that the two races do not mix; intermarriage is forbidden and this resulted in “these unfortunate people [having] no hope of ever becoming blended with the rest of the population” (AAR 216). Gaskell alludes here to the fixation on ‘pure [Anglo-Saxon] blood’ in England in the nineteenth century and reflects this burning question: “are the Englishmen of today pure Saxons and Angles or partly Celts?”

⁵³ At the end of his deconstruction of “An Accursed Race” Wolfreys poses rhetorically whether the narrative’s “accursed race” might not indeed be the English, rather than the Cagots or even English treatment of minorities within English geographical boundaries (88, 201n37).

(Hodgkin 109). Anglo-Saxon blood was considered to be the ideal and diluting this 'pure' blood (with, for example, Celtic blood) would, it was thought, cause English society to degenerate. Already in the eighteenth century Robert Bakewell's experiments on animals led him (and others) to conclude that it was imperative that races inbreed in order to retain their purity and pedigree (Young, *Ethnicity* 53). In the nineteenth century, Knox argued that there is natural racial antagonism between the (superior, English) Saxon race and the (inferior, un-English) Celts (Young, *Ethnicity* 82). He wrote: "The really momentous question for England, as a *nation*, is the presence of three sections of the Celtic race still on her soil . . . and how to dispose of them . . . The race must be forced from the soil . . . England's safety requires it" (qtd. in Young, *Ethnicity* 83). Gaskell thus alludes to these theories in this narrative and, at least on its didactic level, implies in her references to the "good people of the pure race" (AAR 216) that, in English minds at least, there is but one of these: the Anglo-Saxon race.

At the same time, I believe that if we focus on the narrative's "moral," we can conclude that Gaskell cautions her English audience to think critically about its racial stance in relation to the 'accursed' races within Britain's boundaries. The Cagots are *an* accursed race, one of several, and this may be an oblique reference to English differentiation between its own 'pure' (Anglo-Saxon) race and various marginalized peoples within its own borders, including the Irish Celts. A link in the narrative between the Cagots and the Irish Celts is that the Cagots' forebears were supposedly Arian Goths who had much in common with the Irish Celts. For example, the Arian Goths were the first Christianized people of Europe; similarly, Ireland was an early centre of Christian culture and activity in Britain.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ The Goths were converted due to the missionary work of Bishop Ulfilius in the fourth century AD. The Irish were converted due to the missionary efforts of its patron saint,

Moreover, there was religious unorthodoxy in both groups: the Arian Goths adopted the views of the heretic, Arius, whereas the Irish were largely Catholic, considered an un-English faith in the mid-nineteenth century.⁵⁵ In “An Accursed Race,” the Arian Goths have evolved into “good Catholics” (AAR 214) (as are the Irish Celts), but they have a further link to religious unorthodoxy because Gaskell herself belonged to an unorthodox sect (the Unitarians) and was sympathetic to Arian beliefs (Chapple, *Unitarian Dissent* 164).⁵⁶

Assuming that Gaskell comments in this narrative on the opposition between the Anglo-Saxon (‘pure’) race and the Celtic (‘accursed’) race, a relevant question is whether she goes along with or critiques this position. While she does not completely escape the racism of her time,⁵⁷ Gaskell does challenge notions of racial purity. First, she describes the Cagots sympathetically as “miserable” and “unfortunate” (AAR 211) and places them in the context of the histories of oppressed minority races, “who, driven from one land of refuge, steal into another equally unwilling to receive them; and where, for long centuries, their presence is barely endured, and no pains is taken to conceal the repugnance which the natives of ‘pure blood’ experience towards them” (AAR 211). In presenting this race as pitiable, Gaskell can be seen to urge more flexible notions of Englishness that accommodate racial and religious

Patrick, in the fifth century AD.

⁵⁵ Arius’ doctrines were rejected by mainstream Christianity at the Council of Nicea in 325AD.

⁵⁶ In Gaskell’s period there were two strands of Unitarianism: Humanitarians and Arians (Harbottle 9). Gaskell was Arian (*Letters* 648).

⁵⁷ She refers to the Cagots’ (and potentially Celtic) ‘otherness’ in a variety of ways. First, she contrasts them to rational, nineteenth-century Englishness by referring to their superstitions and “magical powers” (AAR 215, 216). She also describes their barbarity; for example, in their playing football with the “ghastly, bloody heads” (AAR 215) of their slain enemies. There is a hint here that, while the English ought to be more inclusive in their notions of Englishness, at the same time the Celts are not as advanced or as superior as the English. At the same time, Gaskell’s inclusive Englishness would expect, at the very least, respect for the Celtic race.

differences. This is confirmed in the narrative's concluding "moral of this history of the accursed race" (AAR 228) in which the reader is asked to consider the epitaph on the grave of an English woman, Mrs. Mary Hand: "What faults you saw in me,/ Pray strive to shun;/ And look at home; there's/ Something to be done" (AAR 228). Mary Hand is buried in Warwickshire, an area described in *Wives and Daughters* as "the heart of England" (WD 260). Gaskell situates herself within this English setting to call for action: "look at home" (England), and act; stop persecuting "innocent and industrious people" with "causeless rancour" (AAR 228). That is, she is telling her readers to learn from the faults of others (that is, the French), that Englishness should include those who are currently 'other' within English society.

Gaskell thus challenged popular notions concerning a 'pure' Anglo-Saxon race in "An Accursed Race" by sympathising with the plight of the 'accursed' race. She strengthens her critique in this narrative by engaging with and referring to the scientific thinking of her time, reducing the perceived differences between the races by suggesting they are all of "the same blood." I will return to this theme later in this chapter.

Race Seen Through the Lens of Historical Accounts

Intertwined with English notions of racial superiority was a particular emphasis in the writing of mid-nineteenth-century historians on race as the key to understanding history (Ross 90). Historians of this period adopted the English Saxonist historical model which stemmed from Scottish Enlightenment thinking (Pittock 38). Indeed, Robert J.C. Young argues that "Saxonism was not invented by the racial theorists but by historians: it was they who over many years developed the ideology of the English as Saxons, and of the continuing national Anglo-Saxon legacy" (*Ethnicity* 31). Barczewski also comments on the

“unprecedented attention to the past” (48) in the nineteenth century, and that most of the histories written during this period were

conceived, written, and marketed specifically as histories of *England*. They were written for an English audience in praise of English institutions, and it was English national identity which they helped to define and proclaim. The great nineteenth century historians believed that everything of value had been born and bred in England. (49)

Gaskell thus wrote in a context when the discourses of history and race (with a particular bias for anything English) were closely interrelated.

Gaskell was part of the cultural movement in the nineteenth century frequently labelled as the Whig interpretation of history (Barczewski 73, Parrinder 85), with its focus on interpreting English history as social and political progress centred around the struggle for a constitutional political system, and in which the Glorious Revolution of 1688, the Protestant victory over the Catholic and absolutist Stuart dynasty, was a critical milestone.⁵⁸ Thomas Macaulay writes in his *History of England* (1849) that after the Glorious Revolution England’s history “is eminently the history of physical, of moral, and of intellectual improvement” (2).⁵⁹ Moreover, this progressive (or liberal) interpretation of history, which stressed

⁵⁸ Historians of this period include Henry Hallam (*Constitutional History of England*, 1827), Francis Palgrave (*History of the Anglo-Saxons*, 1831), Edward Bulwer-Lytton (*Harold, the Last of the Saxon Kings*, 1848), John Mitchell Kemble (*The Saxons in England*, 1849), Thomas Babington Macaulay (*History of England*, 1849), E.A. Freeman (*The History of the Norman Conquest of England*, 1867), William Stubbs (*Constitutional History of England in its Origin and Development*, 1874-8), and J.R. Green (*A Short History of the English People*, 1874). This list of historians in the nineteenth century is not exhaustive, and neither does it document all their works. It does, however, give an indication of the emphasis historians of Gaskell’s period placed on English history and its Saxon origins.

⁵⁹ This is not to say, however, that all Scottish Enlightenment historians would have necessarily agreed with all of the views expressed in nineteenth-century historiography. David Hume, for example, whose *History of England* (1751) was the pre-eminent historical

England's Protestant identity and "Saxon constitutional freedoms" (Young, *Ethnicity* 16), situated the beginnings of Englishness in "the free moot of the Saxon village" (Colls *Englishness* 44-45) and in the Venerable Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English* (c731).⁶⁰ Victorian historians identified the English Civil War of the seventeenth century as the nation's central rite of passage, this war being regarded as the culmination of a history of struggle for constitutional freedom harking back to Saxon times and the Magna Carta and finally resolved in the Glorious Revolution of 1688 (Parrinder 86). Parrinder notes that the English Civil War was considered by nineteenth-century historians to be the "necessary bloodletting prior to an age of prosperity, political civility, and overseas expansion" (85). Accordingly, *North and South* provides a clear example of Gaskell's historical perspective, where the character who describes himself as Teutonic (Saxon), and aligns himself with Oliver Cromwell and constitutional freedoms is the industrialist John Thornton, depicted as the modern, progressive 'new blood' of England.

Nineteenth-century historians developed the popular idea that Englishness had a long (and glorious) history, harking back to Anglo-Saxon freedom, the Venerable Bede, and the feats of the English Anglo-Saxon hero, King Alfred the Great. These factors are also present in Gaskell's *Wives and Daughters*. Already on the novel's first page, Gaskell constructs an impression of a long history of Englishness. First, she refers to the novel's protagonist, Molly Gibson, as living in a shire, an administrative district under the

account of English history until Macaulay's *History of England* (1849) wrote of the Whigs' "senseless clamour" and that "it is ridiculous to consider the English constitution before that period [of the Stuart monarchs] as a regular plan of liberty" (qtd. in Fieser, xvi). Nevertheless, nineteenth century notions of Saxon superiority and a liberal view of history can be traced in part to the Scottish Enlightenment.

⁶⁰ See, for example, Ackroyd (37), Hastings (36), and Wormald (26). Adrian Hastings outlines two key levels of unity at this time: England's geography, which was largely made up of a "single island" (36), and England's ecclesiastical unity, centred in Canterbury and with bishops in London, Winchester, York, and Lindisfarne (37).

jurisdiction of an earl: “In a country [that is, England], there was a shire, and in that shire . . . there lay a little girl; wide awake and longing to get up” (WD 5). Hastings comments that:

I have long thought that if there was one institution which produced the English nation it was the shire. The shires were already in place . . . by the early eleventh century . . . The shires – backed by that parallel Saxon institution, the boroughs and borough courts – were to provide the building blocks of the nation for a thousand years. (40-41)

By situating Molly Gibson within, specifically, a shire, Gaskell also places her within that long tradition of English institutions. Two paragraphs later we read that the ringing of the church bells called “everyone to their daily work, *as they had done for hundreds of years*” (WD 5, emphasis mine). Thus, this young girl is meshed into the rhythms of life in the shire and the English nation, symbolized by the rhythmic, traditional ringing of the bells each morning.

Family lineage is closely linked to a long English (national) history in *Wives and Daughters*. Young writes that “[i]n Britain, lineage was always associated with 'stock' and 'pedigree' . . . In the case of England in the early nineteenth century, this meant being of Saxon or Teutonic stock” (*Ethnicity* 52, 53). *Wives and Daughters* contrasts the two main families in this novel, the Cumnors and the Hamleys. While the Cumnors are depicted as Johnny-come-latelys, the Hamleys are described as a “very old family” (WD 41). Indeed, the squire and his ancestors have been called “squire as long back as local tradition extended” (WD 40): “Squire Hamley's . . . family had been in possession of [his estate] long before the Earls of Cumnor had been heard of . . . no one in Hollingford knew the time when the Hamleys had not lived in Hamley” (WD 41).⁶¹ Later, the novel indicates that the Hamleys

⁶¹ The Hamley's long lineage is emphasised in “hám” being Old English for “home” and frequently denoted for town, village, or manor. See *Oxford English Dictionary*.

predate King Alfred (WD 73); the Cumnors achieved their aristocratic status only in the early eighteenth century. Squire Hamley says to his son, Roger, whom he has forbidden to accept an invitation for dinner at Cumnor Hall: “remember you're one of the Hamleys, who've been on the same land for hundreds of years, while they're but trumpery Whig folk who only came into the country in Queen Anne's time” (WD 306).

Not unlike those with 'pure' blood in “An Accursed Race,” maintaining the pedigree of the family's bloodline is crucially important for Squire Hamley, who, at the beginning of the novel, refers several times to the inappropriateness of his oldest son, Osborne, marrying someone like Molly Gibson, the local doctor's daughter: “In his father's eyes, Osborne was the representative of the ancient house of Hamley of Hamley, the future owner of the land which had been there for a thousand years” (WD 82). The family history of the Hamleys is a key factor in this novel. Parrinder notes that “the more prominently the genealogy is stated at the outset, the more clearly is family identity linked to national identity” (33). In this case, the family identity is clearly the Hamley's, not the Cumnors'. In other words, the novel aligns the Hamleys with popular constructions of Englishness as defined in the nineteenth century; that is, firmly linked to a long history dating back to the Saxons. However, while the Hamley family's pedigree seems vital to their identity, this pedigree unravels in a very short space of time. First, Squire Hamley is introduced as “continuing the primitive manners and customs of his forefathers, the squires of the eighteenth century” (WD 41). The use of the word *primitive* suggests that he hasn't progressed from the Enlightenment's third (agricultural) stage but remains fixed in the previous century, thereby “woefully mismanag[ing] his estate” (WD 228). The financial fallout of this mismanagement is outlined in chapter twenty-two, titled “The Old Squire's Troubles,” and is in contrast to the successful land developments of Lord Cumnor's agent, Mr. Preston, in chapter thirty, titled “Old Ways

and New Ways.” The squire's heir, Osborne Hamley, too, does not live up to his father's expectations. Early in the novel, the squire says to his wife, “Osborne will have had a first-rate education – as good as any man in this country – he'll have this property, and he's a Hamley of Hamley; not a family in the shire is as old as we are, or settled on their ground so well. Osborne may marry where he likes” (WD 56-7) – that is, into the highest strata of society. However, the squire's pride in the ancient (English) lineage of his family is destroyed when Osborne not only fails in attaining honours at university, but also incurs large debts, putting the family finances at great risk, and marries Aimée, a penniless, French, Roman Catholic, ex-nursery maid (WD 494).

The squire's pride in English pedigree is also evident in his attitude towards the French. Osborne muses about “his father's hatred for the French” (WD 259). He knows that his father would consider Aimée to be a completely unsuitable wife for the heir of this pedigreed family. This unsuitability is closely connected to Aimée's un-Englishness, as can be concluded from Osborne's thoughts about her:

And then he considered that if Aimée had had the unspeakable, the incomparable blessing of being born of English parents, in the very heart of England – Warwickshire, for instance – and had never heard of priests, or mass, or confession, or the Pope, or Guy Fawkes, but had been born, baptized, and bred in the Church of England, without having ever seen the outside of a dissenting meeting-house, or a papist chapel – even with all these advantages, her having been a . . . nursery-maid . . . would be a shock to his father's old ancestral pride that he would hardly ever get over. (WD 260)

Finally, to top it off, Osborne dies, leaving an infant son with a French mother, who becomes the next heir of Hamley. Thus, not only are the family fortunes diminishing rapidly, but the family's blood line is 'polluted' with 'foreign' blood.

By the novel's conclusion, therefore, the Hamley family's fortunes and circumstances have undergone substantial change. Of particular note is the development in the squire's characterization. Whereas his initial reaction to the news of Aimée is to send her back to France as soon as "she's fit to travel" (WD 573), by the novel's conclusion she is "much better friends with the squire" (WD 640), and they are joined by a mutual love for the little heir, Osborne and Aimée's son. Responding to her step-mother's remark that "the squire would have desired a better-born heir than the offspring of a servant" (WD 638), Molly says that the squire is very fond of the young boy and "looks on him as the apple of his eye" (WD 638). Aimée is thus not returned to France post-haste, but is given lodging, together with her son, not four hundred yards from Hamley Hall (WD 640).

Keeping in mind that the Hamley family represents England's long history, dating back to the Saxons, and the significance of this in relation to Englishness in the nineteenth century, why does Gaskell construct this family in this way? Jenny Uglow notes that Gaskell suggests that "history . . . is cyclical as well as progressive" (371). In *Wives and Daughters* there is a cyclical nature to history (the Hamley family continues to live on its land) but there is progress, too. Not only have attitudes changed somewhat, as can be seen in the squire's friendship with Aimée, but, because the heir of Hamley has a French, Roman Catholic, and working-class mother, he has a far different pedigree from his father, and this will, presumably, have repercussions as he grows into adulthood.

Gaskell's progressive view of society, and thus also of Englishness, can thus be seen in the generational changes within the Hamley family. Squire Hamley's infant heir, Roger

Stephen Osborne Hamley, represents new blood lines in one of England's 'old' families. This progressive version of history, seen in the subtle changing of family blood lines, is also present in other stories by Gaskell, including "Morton Hall" (1853). In this short story the Mortons have "old blood" (MH 168), are Tories, and fought on the "right side" (with the Royalist army) in the English Civil War. The plot contrasts two marriages in two different eras. The first is of a Roundhead and a Cavalier marriage, between Sir John Morton and Alice Carr, which ends disastrously. Since the Mortons had sided with Charles I, their land was seized by Oliver Cromwell and given to Richard Carr, Alice's father, a Puritan "Scotch pedlar" (MH 169). Sir John's marriage to Alice is supposed to bring together the political and religious differences embodied in these two opposing families, but, as can be seen in their troubled marriage, these differences remain unresolved. The second marriage in this story occurs almost two hundred years later: the marriage of the remaining aristocratic Morton (orphaned, young, defenceless Miss Cordelia) to "one of the great mill-owners at Drumble" (MH 202).⁶² This mill-owner, Mr. Marmaduke Carr, turns out to be a descendant of the earlier Roundhead/Cavalier marriage (MH 202). This marriage is happier than the earlier marriage. The social and political divisions seem to have been smoothed over, giving the impression that, while reconciling these differences was impossible in the seventeenth century, by the nineteenth century society has progressed to the point of reconciliation. Moreover, by marrying a mill owner (and thereby into the industrial classes), the old Morton family metamorphoses into modernity. This is already predicted by Alice Carr, the wife in the first marriage, who "doomed [the Mortons] to die out of the land, and their house to be razed to the ground, while pedlars and huxtars, such as her own people, her father, had

⁶² Drumble is Gaskell's term in this short story and in *Cranford* for Manchester.

been, should dwell where the knightly Mortons had once lived” (MH 177).⁶³ This prophecy comes true in part since between these two marriages comes the squandering of the Morton fortune and the impoverishment to the point of starvation of the Morton family’s final two members, Miss Phillis and her nephew, the squire, John Marmaduke Morton, who both die tragically. What Alice Carr does not foresee, however, is the rebirth of the Morton family and the increase of their fortunes when Miss Cordelia marries a “huxtar” of sorts, a “cotton spinner of Drumble” (MH 177, 200) who carries an old Morton family name, Marmaduke. Thus this marriage of blood lines achieves progress. While the earlier marriage is a disaster, the later marriage between Miss Cordelia and Marmaduke Carr promises a happier future, symbolised in the naming of their first child, a daughter named “Phillis Carr” (MH 203) – this name is itself a hybrid, with Phillis being a Morton name, and Carr the ‘new’ family name. Again, in terms of Englishness, Gaskell is promoting a progressive view, that Englishness ought to branch out beyond narrow family blood lines, and incorporate the social changes brought about by the Industrial Revolution. Indeed, by the end of the story the Mortons have metamorphosed from an aristocratic “English family of note” (MH 167) into a middle-class, “cotton spinning” family – further symbolized by the razing of the old Morton Hall in order to build streets on the old site (MH 167, 203).

This same pattern of progress occurs in the impending marriage between the industrialist John Thornton and the upper-class Margaret Hale at the conclusion of *North and South*. References in the novel to the English Civil War show that these two characters begin at opposite poles. In one of their earlier discussions, Thornton comments that “Cromwell would have made a capital mill-owner” (NS 113), to which Margaret replies sharply, “Cromwell is no hero of mine” (NS 114). Indeed Margaret’s maternal ancestors, the

⁶³ Huxtar is a derogatory term for “small shop keepers or pedlars” (Lewis, 308 n177).

Beresfords, aligned themselves with Charles I, and her mother recalls that the annual toast of her uncle's household was the Cavalier cry: "Church and king and down with the rump" (NS 43). By the novel's conclusion, however, the old antagonisms have been replaced by Thornton's and Margaret's planned (economic and marriage) alliances.

This novel is, however, unlike other courtship novels of that period. Thornton's industrial money does not save an impecunious aristocracy, as happens in "Morton Hall." Instead, it is Margaret's money, a legacy she receives towards the end of the novel from the will of her godfather, Mr. Bell, which saves a now bankrupt mill owner. Upsetting the plot line in this way answers those Marxist critics who see this romance in *North and South* as an irritating subplot, a distraction to the primary intent of this industrial (condition-of-England) novel; this 'twist' implies that perhaps this novel is not in the first place an industrial novel, but, instead, through the character development of Margaret and Thornton as they move towards marriage, comments on irrevocable social change in a period when the English were trying to make sense of who they were.⁶⁴ More recently, while conceding that *North and South* is a condition-of-England novel, Deirdre d'Albertis has highlighted deeper complexities within it (*Dissembling Fictions* 46) and Patsy Stoneman notes that it is necessary to orient criticism of this social-problem novel not solely on the axis of Marxist

⁶⁴ Critics who foreground *North and South* as being primarily a condition-of-England novel include Louis Cazamian in *The Social Novel and England* (1903, tr. Into English 1973), Mary Eagleton and David Pearce in *Attitudes to Class in the English Novel* (1979), Catherine Gallagher in *The Industrial Reformation of English Fiction: Social Discourse and Narrative Form 1832-1867* (1985), Arnold Kettle in *Dickens to Hardy* (1958), Coral Lansbury in *Elizabeth Gaskell: The Novel of Social Class* (1975), George Levine in *The Realistic Imagination* (1981), John Lucas in "Mrs Gaskell and Brotherhood" (1966), Alan Shelston in his Preface to the *Norton Critical Edition of North and South* (2005), and Raymond Williams in *Culture and Society* (1983). Such critics generally view *North and South* as complementary to *Mary Barton*, another condition-of-England novel, in its aim of fostering understanding between labour and capital, in which, at best, the marriage sub-plot is an attempt to resolve the tensions of the novel's industrial social problems.

theory (78).⁶⁵ Considering this more recent criticism and that Gaskell's rationale for writing is to "faithfully tell stories so that some lesson can be learned" (*Letters* 449), Rosemarie Bodenheimer's argument that this novel is "about irrevocable change, and about the confused process of response and accommodation that attends it" (531) is reasonable. In presenting change, Gaskell attempts to teach some truth, to provide answers to questions raised in (and by) her milieu.

What might this change be and how does this relate to Englishness? The title of *North and South* can be traced to Charles Dickens, who published this novel in *Household Words* (Bodenheimer 531). Dickens suggested that Gaskell change the novel's title from *Margaret Hale* to *North and South*, thereby setting up an implied dichotomy between pastoral and industrial worlds. Gaskell's choice of *Margaret Hale* indicates that her focal point was less the hard times of the working classes and more the confused process of Margaret Hale's development. Schor notes that this novel is the most clearly centred of Gaskell's novels on its "heroine's expanding consciousness" (120). The main focus is Margaret's 'expansion' in the context of industrial Milton. Not unlike Squire Hamley in *Wives and Daughters*, who needs to change his squirearchical preconceptions about social order in order to accept his low-born French daughter-in-law and grandson, Margaret needs to move on from the upper-class bias evidenced in comments such as "[a]re those the Gormans who made their fortunes in trade at Southampton? Oh! I'm glad we don't visit them. I don't like shoppy people" (NS 19). Similarly, Margaret has to change "old Helstone [southern] habits of thought" (NS 144), such as the assumption that the working classes automatically need poor relief, which is interpreted by the working-class Nicholas Higgins as "impertinence on

⁶⁵ Kate Flint and Sally Shuttleworth also recognise the intertwining of gender and authority in this novel. See Flint's *Elizabeth Gaskell*, 36-44, and Shuttleworth's introduction to *North and South*.

her part" (NS 68). Furthermore, in the chapter titled "Men and Gentlemen" it becomes evident in a discussion between Margaret and Thornton that they "understand the words differently" (NS 150), with Margaret having an upper-class perspective on family bloodlines, seeing "a person in relation to others [rather than, as Thornton sees it] . . . in relation to himself, to life – to time – to eternity" (NS 150). By the novel's conclusion, however, Margaret has learned not only to have a real friendship with Nicolas Higgins' daughter, Bessy, but has also agreed to marry the industrialist Thornton, not because she needs financial security, but because she has replaced her upper-class views with a more inclusive outlook, valuing all people, be they working class or the new industrial class. Gaskell thus uses her depiction of Margaret's expanding vision to demonstrate her progressive view of history. In doing so she advocates a democratic view of English society in which the participants include not only the upper classes but also the mill owners and the working classes.⁶⁶

Each of these stories suggests that old antagonisms can be resolved, and that families with 'old blood' can metamorphose into the commercial, industrial age that characterises mid-nineteenth-century notions of Englishness. These themes are present both in stories written in the earlier years of Gaskell's publishing life ("Morton Hall" was published in 1853 and *North and South* in 1854-55) and in her final novel, *Wives and Daughters*, published a decade later in 1864-65. Throughout Gaskell's career, her work indicates the view that even ancient, 'Saxon' families need to change with the times, to

⁶⁶ In this chapter I focus on Margaret's development, to the point of being open to the criticism that I ignore John Thornton's transformation. The point of this discussion, however, is that, in a progressive view of history, 'old blood' metamorphoses – for the Hamley family in incorporating French blood into its bloodline, for the Mortons to be 'rescued' by a mill-owner, and for Margaret Hale in learning to cast off her upper-class exclusivity for a more nuanced, inclusive view of society.

modernise their thinking in relation to 'sacred' aspects of lineage such as preserving the family's 'pure' blood and its land. She thereby aligns herself with the Scottish Enlightenment historians who argued in favour of the gradual change of civilization as a valuable path towards progress.

Gaskell presents aspects of Saxonism in a context of change. While, on the one hand, she seems to be saying that nothing in history is clear-cut, she does seem to imply that the progress of civilization, as defined by the historians of her period, is inevitable. This complex presentation of history reflects the feelings of her time in which, while the superiority of the English race was still generally accepted as fact, the reasons and origins for this superiority continued to be debated. Gaskell's earlier writing, such as "An Accursed Race," "Morton Hall," and *North and South*, may have contributed to sparking these debates, and her later novel, *Wives and Daughters*, is part of the milieu that wrestled with the question "What are we English? Does anyone know? . . . We had got it so comfortably settled that we were a Germanic, or Teutonic, or Saxon people" (*Anthropological Review*, 257-58). The reason for this change of perspective in England was, in part, related to changes in scientific investigation and conclusions, such as those found in Darwin's *Origin of Species*.

Race Seen Through the Lens of Science

Scientific investigation in the nineteenth century revealed that assumptions about English Saxon racial purity was not as clear-cut as initially assumed, although, at the same time, notions of English superiority continued to involve a valuing of Anglo-Saxon descent. The four-stages theory of history and scientific theory overlapped in part because these theories developed, albeit in differing academic spheres, side by side in the same intellectual milieu, resulting in similar views of the "natural progression" of humankind (Wheeler 184). Rapidly

losing the religious certainties of past generations, historians of the post-Enlightenment period reasoned that historical narrative required scientific evidence to underpin their conclusions. Henry Buckle, for example, identified the need for scientific fact to corroborate historical details. He writes in 1857 that:

The unfortunate peculiarity of history is that although its separate parts have been examined with considerable ability, hardly anyone has attempted to combine them into a whole, and ascertain the way in which they are connected with each other . . . [Therefore] for all the higher purposes of human thought history is still miserably deficient and presents that confused and anarchical appearance natural to a subject of which the laws are unknown and even the foundation unsettled. (177)

Developments in scientific theory settled the ‘foundations’ by, in the main, supporting the validity of the historical theory in that period. This new way of organising knowledge was welcomed by the English Unitarians, including Elizabeth Gaskell. Unitarianism valued rational thought and scientific investigation, and soaked up the research of scientists such as Charles Darwin. As I have already discussed, Gaskell had intimate knowledge of developments in the biological science of her period, and this, in turn, informed her sense of Englishness, as I will discuss in this section.

Thus, for those who viewed historical theories as inadequate for explaining the development of English national identity, racial discourse and Englishness came under scientific enquiry, with an emphasis on providing proof for prior conclusions about race. This ‘proof’ was supplied in part by Darwin’s *Origin of Species*, which presented a paradigm that pulled together a variety of historical and scientific thoughts of the mid-nineteenth century. Darwin provided what was considered by many to be a “settled foundation” of biological

evolution (Shaw 76), thereby also providing a model to explain 'natural progression' in historians' theories of social history.⁶⁷ In many ways, therefore, Darwin (and others) seemed to validate earlier theories that came out of the Scottish Enlightenment and subsequently informed historical narrative in the nineteenth century. At the same time, while 1859 is a significant date in cultural history, Darwin's concept of evolution was not startlingly original to his intellectual contemporaries but comfortably accommodated historical and philosophical theories of his milieu that emphasized social evolution. The significance of Darwin's theories was that they provided scientific 'proof' to common assumptions about racial development in which 'primitive' races were seen as morally deficient and less intelligent than the 'civilized' white races (including the English).⁶⁸ As Peter J. Bowler points out in *The Invention of Progress*:

The increasingly popular belief that savage races retained a primitive level of culture because of their inferior mental powers . . . was but a short step to the claim that the people of the early Palaeolithic were less intelligent than ourselves, which in turn allowed them to be portrayed as intermediates in a line of development by which civilized mankind had emerged from an ape ancestry. The theory of biological evolution could thus be presented as a natural extension of the cultural evolutionism gaining ground in anthropology and archaeology.

(86)

⁶⁷ Other scholars who comment on the impact of Darwinian theory on historical theory include Nancy Henry (2007) and Louise Henson (2003).

⁶⁸ For more information on development in scientific ideas about race and evolution, as well as where Darwin fits into this, see Peter J. Bowler's *The Invention of Progress: The Victorians and the Past* (1989), 106-28, 135-36.

Moreover, that Darwin's theories were accepted was also due, in part, to earlier writers of science such as Robert Chambers in *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* (1844), acknowledged by Darwin in *Origin of Species* (58).⁶⁹

One outcome of this merging of historical and scientific theory was a greater emphasis on *scientific* explanations of racial superiority. Barczewski notes that Darwin "provided a new language with which to explain old prejudices" (135). Science appeared to validate what historians (and others) postulated concerning English racial superiority, albeit with a greater emphasis on the innate differences between races (Bowler, *Theories* 106; Livingstone 186). Until the 1850s it was generally accepted that the entire human race had a common origin (monogenesis) and all were developing, albeit perhaps at differing rates, towards a common end point. This optimism was tempered from around the mid-nineteenth century. Whether certain races could indeed 'catch up' was increasingly questioned and it was concluded that some races were intellectually and morally deficient, unable to achieve the industrial progress made by white races (such as the English) (Bowler, *Theories* 109). As Young writes: "It only required a small conceptual adjustment to link these [earlier concepts such as 'blood lines', 'stock' and 'pedigree'] to the use of 'race' as a characteristic defined in anatomical and bodily terms – and with it, to produce a new, 'scientific' racialization of the English" (*Ethnicity* 39).

Gaskell includes references to biological scientific inquiry in "An Accursed Race," using these references to contend that scientific research has the potential to uncover

⁶⁹ Samuel Smiles makes a similar observation in his *Autobiography* (1905). When he commenced study at the University of Edinburgh in 1829, one of Smiles' lecturers was John Fletcher, an advocate of Etienne Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire's scientific theories on evolution (I write more about Saint-Hilaire and his influence on Darwin later in this chapter). Describing Fletcher as "a most profound lecturer," Smiles wrote: "when the works of Darwin afterwards came out, I felt that Fletcher had long before expounded very much the same views; or, at all events, had heralded his approach" (qtd. in Boiko 90).

superstitious notions concerning race (and Englishness). She notes, for example, that the Cagots (the minority race) were

repeatedly examined by learned doctors, whose experiments, although singular and rude, appear to have been made in a spirit of humanity. For instance, the surgeons of the king of Navarre, in sixteen hundred, bled twenty-two Cagots, in order to examine and analyse their blood. (AAR 219)

Other references to scientific research include comments such as “[s]ome of these medical men have left us a description” (AAR 219). These medical men include Dr. Guyon, “the medical man of the last century who has left the clearest report” and “other surgeons [who] examined into the subject of the horribly infectious smell which the Cagots were said to leave behind them . . . [and who] also examined their ears” (AAR 220). Gaskell notes Dr. Guyon's meticulous scientific practice of “bringing facts and arguments” (AAR 220). All these references to scientific method combine to make the point that there is nothing inherently wrong with the Cagots, and that the animosity towards them by the ‘pure’ race is emotional and without rational foundation.

Moreover, “An Accursed Race” attacks the scientific conclusions of anatomists of Gaskell’s milieu such as Robert Knox. Knox argued in favour of polygenesis (the assumption that humankind comes from more than a single origin) and the intrinsic superiority of the Anglo-Saxon race.⁷⁰ Knox declared in *The Races of Men*, published in 1850, five years before “An Accursed Race”: “With me race, or hereditary descent, is everything . . . it stamps the man” (6-7). Did Gaskell read Knox's writing? There is no evidence to say that she did. However, considering her intellectual context referred to earlier, it is almost certain that she

⁷⁰ Knox’s views on polygenesis was at odds with both the Biblical account of the creation of Adam and Eve as well as Darwin’s *Origin of Species*, which, while differing significantly to the Bible, also assumes a monogenist origin of humankind.

would have known about it. Indeed, Knox taught anatomy in Edinburgh during Gaskell's first visit there. This visit came less than two years after the infamous Burke and Hare scandal in which Knox was implicated (although exonerated) by the Royal Society of Edinburgh; the scandal generated much conjecture and talk, and Gaskell could not have been unaware of it.⁷¹

In response to scientists such as Knox, Gaskell notes a number of things about the racial background of the socially-maligned Cagots in "An Accursed Race." First, she asserts that scientific investigation proves that their blood is "just like that of other people" (AAR 219), thereby implying a monogenist point of view. Dr. Guyon's scientific inquiries in this account confirm that the 'pure' race should "receive Cagots as fellow-creatures" (AAR 221). In including statements such as these, Gaskell enters the nineteenth-century debate which continued out of the anti-slavery debates prior to the Abolition Act of 1833. A continuing issue in England at that time was "what Measures ought to be adopted with regard to the NATIVE INHABITANTS of Countries where BRITISH SETTLEMENTS are made" (qtd. in Kenny 368, from a report written by the Parliamentary Select Committee on the Aboriginal Tribes, 1837). This report led to the formation of the Aborigines' Protection Society with the motto 'of one blood' (Kenny 368). In 1843 the Aborigines' Protection Society extended its philanthropic and political priorities to include scientific inquiry, thereby forming the Ethnological Society of London (Kenny 369). Some of Gaskell's friends, including Sir James Kay-Shuttleworth, were members of this Society. Gaskell's reference to the Cagots' blood being "just like that of other people" aligns her with the research and conclusion of these

⁷¹ The Burke and Hare murders occurred in Scotland in 1827 and 1828. Most of the dead bodies were sold to Robert Knox who used them in his popular anatomy classes in Edinburgh.

societies, and distances her from a more virulent racial discourse such as that propounded by Knox.

Not only does Gaskell refer to all people being of one blood in “An Accursed Race” but also she refers disapprovingly to the prohibition of intermarriage between the two races. Again, this could be a comment on the theories of polygenists such as Knox. Polygenists theorized that ‘interbreeding’ would have detrimental effects on mental character, and also believed that successive generations of mulattoes would become increasingly sterile (Harris 100). In “An Accursed Race,” Gaskell argues that the scientific direction of the mid-nineteenth century, which foregrounded incorrect ideas about ‘interbreeding,’ is leading racial discourse and notions of Englishness in the wrong direction. She points out that the “unfortunate race” is in reality strong, healthy, and vigorous; they attain a “vigorous old age” (AAR 220) and are a “well made, powerful race” (AAR 223). Moreover, not only are they “industrious” (AAR 228) but also “intelligent” (AAR 217). Earlier in the account, the narrator comments that the Cagots' ancestors are not unlike the English themselves: “tall, largely made, and powerful in frame; fair and ruddy in complexion” (AAR 219). Gaskell contrasts these positive physical characteristics with the attitudes of the superstitious ‘pure race’ which remain hostile towards the Cagots despite the outcome of the scientific investigations. Gaskell's narrator is clear: the “prejudice against mixed marriages” (AAR 221) is “causeless rancour” (AAR 228), disproven by scientists.

“An Accursed Race” predates by four years Darwin's comments in *Origin of Species* about the necessity of interbreeding in order for natural selection to occur. Gaskell's touching on this topic in “An Accursed Race” indicates that a narrative such as this was in the vanguard of cultural contributions to scientific discussions of the time. These allusions to scientific ideas in Gaskell's writing illustrate Gillian Beer's assumptions in *Darwin's Plots* that

Victorian works of fiction stand side by side with scientific works such as Darwin's *Origin of Species*, and demonstrates O'Gorman's contention that "literature and science, once thought to be two separate and oppositional activities [are] fruitfully interrelated practices [working together in] articulating and helping produce the culture from which they emerged" (230).⁷² At the same time, Henson's comment is also pertinent that, while Gaskell and Darwin had a common "social and intellectual foundation" (*History, Science and Social Change* 31), they also had separate motivations for their writing, Darwin to present evidence underpinning his biological theory of natural selection and Gaskell to give "textual strategies for ordering and legitimizing social change" (Henson, *History, Science* 31). Both discourses existed side by side in forming the culture of their time and contributed to changing notions of Englishness.

While Gaskell is thus not entirely racially unprejudiced in "An Accursed Race,"⁷³ she does separate herself, at least in part, from thinking such as that of Knox and of the new generation of racially-conscious anthropologists such as James Hunt who set up the Anthropological Society of London in 1864, two years after Knox's death. Anatomists such as Knox and Hunt argued not only that humankind originated from more than one original set of parents, but also that, since human species are immutable, inferior races would never catch up with those of superior origin (such as the Anglo-Saxons) simply because they could not. Gaskell, on the other hand, aligned herself closely with the optimistic, liberally thinking,

⁷² See *Darwin's Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (2000) by Gillian Beer. Other scholars who focus on the cross-over between science and literature include Tess Cosslett (*The 'Scientific Movement' and Victorian Literature*, 1982) and George Levine (*Darwin and the Novelists: Patterns of Science in Victorian Fiction*, 1992).

⁷³ For example, in her inferences about French racial inferiority, referred to earlier in this chapter, and in her comments about the Cagots' 'uncivilized' behaviour such as playing football with their slain enemies' heads.

and less racially virulent Ethnological Society of London (ESL), that stressed monogenism and the inherent ability of those of 'savage' races to progress towards civilization. In doing so, she promoted a more inclusive view of what Englishness ought to embrace. She did so in line with ideological (and philosophical) changes happening within the ESL. Robert Kenny notes the "fundamental shift" that occurred in the ESL as a result of Darwinian influence (368), observing that prior to 1859 the ESL reflected evangelical, religious convictions concerning the essential equality of all people, views that underpinned both the slavery debates at the turn of the century and missionary activity in the first decades of the nineteenth century. After the publication of Darwin's *Origin of Species*, the Darwinian camp changed the direction of the ESL by emphasising distinctions between races which had developed as a result of differing mental capacities. Kenny writes that "in doing so [the ESL] established a new 'scientific' argument for human inequality that was to have far-reaching and surprising effects" (368).⁷⁴ Gaskell wrote within this context of directional change in racial discourse, aligning herself with these shifts.

Gaskell's ready acceptance of parts of Darwinian theory was no doubt partly because Charles Darwin was a distant cousin through her maternal Holland relations (Uglow 219, 560), and, being only one year younger than Gaskell, her contemporary. Further, Gaskell was personally acquainted with Darwin; several of her extant letters refer to her cordial relations with Darwin and his family (*Letters* 157, 158, 411, 902). Not only was Gaskell acquainted with Darwin, however, but also, as has already been discussed, and as

⁷⁴ It is important to point out that many of the racial implications and applicatory theories that came out of *Origin of Species* were not propounded by Darwin himself but by those who were influenced by his writings. Even noting this is problematic, however, since many of their ideas predate Darwin. Again, this suggests that *Origin of Species* is not radically unique but fitted into and contributed to cultural theories of the period.

Debrabant and other scholars also note,⁷⁵ Gaskell's writing shows evidence that she was familiar with the scientific theories and discussions of the mid-nineteenth century (Debrabant 14-15). Noting that Gaskell and Darwin met occasionally, Debrabant speculates that Darwin may well have presented his theories to Gaskell, as he did to his wife, Emma Darwin (15). The likelihood of this is strengthened by the fact that Gaskell's visit to Paris in 1855 included a conversation on zoology with the French naturalist Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire (Debrabant 15, *Letters* 229).

Moreover, aligning herself with Darwinian thought was consistent with Gaskell's Unitarian connections. Unitarianism's liberal theology made it easy to include biological evolution as part of God's plan (Chapple, *Unitarian Dissent* 171). Coral Lansbury notes that, despite widespread outrage in religious circles at Darwin's *Origin of Species*, "alone among the Christian sects the Unitarians rejoiced as they saw the plan of nature being unfolded without recourse to marvel or mystery" (194). Indeed, Gaskell's husband, William Gaskell, a Unitarian minister, considered that "both science and theology promised 'a new and higher condition of being'" (qtd. in Chapple, *Unitarian Dissent* 171). Theories such as organic transmutation were enthusiastically embraced because Unitarians realised that a theory such as this had the potential for the development of a far more inclusive society, one that, until then, had put religious denominations such as their own on the periphery of national life (Henson, *History, Science and Social Change* 13).

This alignment with scientific, and particularly Darwinist, thinking is present in Gaskell's final novel, *Wives and Daughters*, which deals with gradual social change. Various other scholars comment on the slow, evolutionary change evident in *Wives and Daughters*,

⁷⁵ Scholars who observe a deliberate link with science/Darwinism in Gaskell's later novels include Deirdre d'Albertis, Kate Flint, Nancy Henry, Pam Morris, Hilary Schor, and Patsy Stoneman.

in which the pace is unhurried, and the plots and counter-plots numerous, with many comic twists and reversals. Nancy Henry notes, for example, that the “interdependence of different kinds of gradual change is frequently emphasized” (161). Pam Morris makes a similar comment about the unhurried nature of the narrative’s development; the early chapters especially move backwards and forwards in time, thereby constructing a rich sense of social and historical interconnectedness between the different elements of the story (xiv).

This change is demonstrated by way of a contrast between Hamley Hall and Cumnor Towers in which scientific progress is associated with the Cumnors who are thereby depicted as part of a ‘new’ Englishness. For example, the agricultural methods of the Hamleys and the Cumnors are contrasted. The Hamleys, owning “not more than eight hundred acres or so” (WD 41), have far less land than do the Cumnors, much of it unusable because of poor drainage which they cannot fix because of insufficient funds. In contrast, the Cumnors’ landscaped park is much larger (at least 2000 acres)⁷⁶ and the Cumnors, having accumulated their money through trade in tobacco, also have the means to improve it; their land-agent “plunged with energy into all manner of improvements . . . draining a piece of outlying waste and unreclaimed land of Lord Cumnor’s” (WD 333). Draining land, described as “well up in agriculture” (WD 336), provided more land for agricultural purposes such as intensive grazing. This focus on the Cumnors’ estate management emphasises their upward mobility. Indeed, the novel records Squire Hamley’s anger at this development, which he links with “Lord Cumnor and his family [having] gone up in the world (‘the Whig rascals!’), both in wealth and in station, as the Hamleys had gone down” (WD 334). Clearly, no matter how far back blood-lines go, they are depicted in this novel as of lesser

⁷⁶ Cumnor Towers is based on Tatton Park in Knutsford, Cheshire, where Gaskell grew up – its landscaped park was improved in the nineteenth century by Humphrey Repton and Joseph Paxton (Fleming and Gore 244).

importance than having the means to develop large tracts of land, even that done by a family whose wealth stems from the selling of tobacco (WD 607).⁷⁷ The Cumnors' ability to improve their property is thus another indicator that the Cumnors represent the 'new' blood of trade and social mobility in nineteenth-century England. Their success in incorporating modern scientific methodology in land improvement, thereby increasing their wealth, depicted as positive in this novel, forms part of Gaskell's inclusive vision of a broader social structure in which up and coming people like the Cumnors are also included in notions of Englishness.

Cumnor Towers has an even larger role to play in this novel, however, since it is at Cumnor Towers (rather than at Hamley Hall) that Roger, whose character is based on Darwin himself, is established as an important scientist. Roger writes a paper that "excited considerable attention, as it was intended to confute some theory of a great French physiologist" (WD 297), and is invited to Cumnor Towers by Lord Hollingford (a scholar himself and Lord Cumnor's son) to "meet M. Geoffroi St H—, whose views on certain subjects Roger had been advocating in the article . . . [since] M. Geoffroi St H— . . . had expressed a wish to meet the author of the paper which had already attracted the attention of the French comparative anatomists" (WD 301).⁷⁸ Subsequently, Roger embarks on a two-year scientific excursion to Africa, sponsored in part by Lord Hollingford, and upon his return to England "the scientific Mr Hamley" (WD 607) is again invited to Cumnor Towers. Roger's

⁷⁷ For more background information on improving landscaped estates see Alistair M. Duckworth's *The Improvement of the Estate: a Study of Jane Austen's Novels*. While Duckworth's emphasis is on Austen's writing, there is, nevertheless, much to be gleaned from this book on the social impact of changing uses of landed estates at the turn of the nineteenth century.

⁷⁸ These French comparative anatomists included Cuvier, Lamarck, and Saint-Hilaire (Morris 665, n5). Morris notes, too, that, in contrast to Cuvier, Lamarck and Saint-Hilaire advocated evolutionary theories of change, and that Roger is thus participating in a newly developing area of scientific research (665-66).

rise as a scientist is thus situated within the context of Cumnor Towers, depicted in the novel as a site of progress and modernity.

It is also significant that Roger and Molly's romance blossoms during this same visit to Cumnor Towers (Molly has been invited to this event by Lord Hollingford's sister, Harriet). Roger and Molly's 'discovery' of each other at Cumnor Towers is no accident, but, rather, suggests that their relationship is also part of new notions of Englishness, found in 'new' families such as the Cumnors. Indeed, Roger's rapid rise to fame as a scientist and Molly's personal development from the local doctor's daughter, for whom her father did not think "reading or writing [to be] necessary" (WD 34), to a poised, well-read young woman who can discuss Georges Cuvier's *Le Regne Animal* with Lord Hollingford at the charity ball (WD 297), is consistent with these social changes. Both Molly and Roger move into the new social system that is developing, described by Quest-Ritson as a "flatter social system which emphasised what people had in common" (145).⁷⁹ It is possible in a society such as this for a lord (Hollingford) to converse with a well-read young woman (Molly), and for the second son of a failing local squire (Roger) to be feted by the scientific elite in the home of an earl (Cumnor). By portraying Roger and Molly as moving on from the traditions of their parents, Gaskell both describes and contributes to social change in this period.

Wives and Daughters thus presents an optimistic view of the progress of society. Indeed, this novel enthusiastically accepts evolutionary theory as a model for social progress (Stoneman 125). Moreover, as in Darwin's theories, evolutionary changes within the novel are subject to chance events. As Morris points out, the novel is made up of "comically ironic reversals" (xv). Indeed, it is the comedy in these reversals that separates Gaskell's writing from George Eliot's, for example (Morris xv). While Eliot's *Middlemarch* exposes the darker

⁷⁹ See also Paul Langford's *Englishness Identified: Manners and Character 1650-1850*.

implications of Darwin's theories, Gaskell, on the other hand, presents "arbitrary circumstances . . . in a predominantly comic light of human frailty, compromise and self-deceptions. The result is survival not destruction" (Morris xv). One of the biggest mistakes in the novel is made by another of the novel's scientists, Mr. Gibson (Morris xv). Gibson marries Mrs. Kirkpatrick, a widow, to protect his daughter, Molly, from the predatory attentions of a "rampant" young man (WD 145), but Mrs. Kirkpatrick turns out to be a 'predator' herself and not particularly inclined to protect young women, as evidenced in the Preston affair in which neither Cynthia (Mrs. Kirkpatrick's daughter) nor Molly come off unscathed. Compared by Debrabant (20ff) to the parasitic cuckoo of *Origin of Species*, Mrs. Kirkpatrick demonstrates her exploitative tendencies in all of her relationships, whether it be with the Cumnors, Mr. Gibson, Molly, the Hamleys, or even her own daughter, Cynthia, who is sent away whenever her presence might get in the way of her mother's plans. This parasitic instinct is evident in her reaction to Gibson's marriage proposal, in which "her liking for Mr Gibson grew in proportion to her sense of the evils from which he was going to serve as a means of escape" (WD 141), and her recognition that he is "bound to support her without any exertion of her own" (WD 159).

Through Mrs. Gibson, Gaskell exposes the essentially self-serving nature of Darwin's theory of natural selection in which only the fit survive. Mrs. Hamley, on the other hand, in contrast to Mrs. Gibson, gradually fades away. Morris notes that Mrs. Hamley "literally gives all of herself to her husband and sons" (xxi), an outcome in a "Darwinian world . . . [where] self-repression upon women fits them only for extinction" (Morris xxi). Mrs. Gibson does not survive, however, in order to reproduce further 'fit' organisms since she is too old to reproduce. Rather, her survival needs to be understood in the characterisation of her daughter, Cynthia, who has this same parasitic tendency as she prevaricates in choosing the

fittest mate – one that is rich enough so she does not have to “toil and moil” (WD 98) for money – eventually selecting a wealthy London lawyer.

Cynthia demonstrates that she has inherited her mother’s survival strategies, but, at the same time, she also exhibits the characteristics of offspring of two organisms (her father and mother) rather than as a product of asexual reproduction, another critical aspect to Darwin’s theories. Cynthia does not become a clone of her mother but is a hybrid survivor. While she has similar parasitic characteristics as her mother, she is more discerning than the latter. Unlike her mother, for example, Cynthia recognises that she and her mother are “interlopers” (WD 437) in the Gibsons’ home whose ‘intrusion’ not only upsets the Gibsons’ domestic scene but also, perhaps unwittingly, Molly’s growing relationship with Roger Hamley, to whom Cynthia is engaged at this stage of the novel. This latter aspect of Cynthia’s ‘intrusion’ is resolved later in the novel, however, when she breaks off the engagement to Roger and marries Mr. Henderson, instead, which then prepares the way for the renewal of Roger and Molly’s earlier slow, unhurried courtship so that by the novel’s conclusion “we know that Roger Hamley will marry Molly” (as stated in the postscript by the *Cornhill Magazine* editor, WD 648). Cynthia’s marriage also differs from her mother’s in that, unlike Gibson, who is given no premonition of his future wife’s foibles, Cynthia tells Henderson about her inconstant ways so that he enters his marriage “fairly warned” (WD 601). Cynthia’s characterisation thus overlaps with, but is not identical to that of, her mother’s, but shows that she is a hybrid of two ‘organisms.’

Thus, in *Wives and Daughters*, Gaskell demonstrates her optimism about Darwinian notions of gradual change by way of her development of generational change, as can be seen in offspring such as Cynthia, as well as Molly Gibson and Roger Hamley, who are foregrounded in the novel as integral to the evolutionary social changes taking place. Roger

Hamley is portrayed as fitter for survival than his father, the squire, who is “awkward and ungainly in society” (WD 42) and “going down fast” (WD 228). Conversely, Roger is portrayed as going from strength to strength. This is attributed by the scientist, Dr. Gibson, to Roger's “mental powers [and] . . . perfect health, which enabled him to work harder and more continuously than most men without suffering” (WD 367). Moreover, Roger's successes are closely aligned with scientific development. Like Charles Darwin, Roger is selected to participate in a voyage of scientific discovery and on his return to England is invited to share his experiences with “eager” fellow scientists (WD 616). Gaskell wrote in a letter to her publisher, George Smith, that “Roger is rough & unpolished – but works out for himself a certain name in Natural Science, – is tempted by a large offer to go around the world (like Charles Darwin) as naturalist” (*Letters* 732).⁸⁰ By contrast, Roger's older brother, Osborne, the heir to the Hamley estate, is portrayed as Roger's opposite: “languid looking,” “frail” and “effeminate” (WD 167), not having the “strong health which has enabled Roger to work as he has done” (WD 367). After a long series of events, in which he fails to live up to his parents' expectations, Osborne dies of a hereditary disorder. However, while Osborne fails to deliver on social and familial expectations, not least in marrying a French woman, he does leave an heir, described as a “large, lusty child” (WD 571), a “sturdy, gallant, healthy little fellow” (WD 575). Indeed, the suggestion in the novel that this child, named Roger, may improve the Hamley gene pool resembles Darwin's comment that “a cross between very distinct individuals of the same species, that is between members of different strains or sub-breeds, give[s] vigour and fertility to the offspring” (*Origin* 76). It is Aimee, a French

⁸⁰ Scholars who deal with the Roger/Darwin connection include: D'Albertis (*Dissembling* 215n2), Gerin (277), Lansbury (194-5), and Uglow (219, 397, 560-61). One difference between Darwin and Roger, however, is that Darwin suffered from ill health later in life while Roger glows with well being.

woman, however, who provides this vigour and fertility to compensate for Osborne's weak strain, thereby showing again Gaskell's inclusive views of Englishness. The novel's (unfinished) ending reinforces this view in its strong hint that Roger will marry Molly despite her inferiority in "rank and family" (WD 631). Gaskell's optimism is once again demonstrated in this slow, evolutionary development that occurs through generational change. In Darwin's words: "a cross with another individual is . . . indispensable" (*Origin* 76).

Since Gaskell died before finishing *Wives and Daughters*, its conclusion is necessarily open-ended, undermining, to some extent, notions of Englishness in this novel. The uncertainty of its ending reinforces the view that, if destiny is not fixed but subject to chance, then Englishness is not necessarily as definite as previously concluded, but subject to the vagaries of time and chance. In a Darwinian world-view, common notions of Englishness in the mid-nineteenth century may not have been as established as mainstream thinking might conclude. Consistent with Darwinian thinking which "brought into question the privileged 'purity' of the 'great family'" (Beer, *Darwin's Plots* 63), one way in which these notions of predictable Englishness are further undermined in *Wives and Daughters* is by its depiction of privilege and 'pure' blood as not fixed but subject to change, decay, and refashioning. Gaskell demonstrates the folly of linking Englishness with 'pure' blood lines by following the fortunes of the Hamley family, whose future is described by the up-and-coming 'new' nineteenth-century man, Mr. Preston: "the family's going down fast; and it's a pity when these old Saxon houses vanish off the land; but it is 'kismet' with the Hamleys" (WD 228). The choice of the word kismet, an Arabic word meaning fate or destiny, implies that the Hamley family is inexorably drawn down by forces outside its control. On one level, their uncertain future is subject to the randomness of chance, but on another level choosing the word kismet (fate) indicates that the Hamley family's future has been predetermined

and will inevitably move in step with its destiny. It cannot do otherwise. The refashioning of this family's destiny has already been noted in the character of Osborne's heir, the young Roger Hamley, who does not have 'pure' Saxon blood, but has a common-born, French, Catholic mother. This child fits Darwinian notions of the hybridity of nations, classes, religions, and families (Morris xxxiii, Stoneman 124).

Gaskell thus embraces Darwinism, particularly in this final novel, *Wives and Daughters*, presenting a vision of an emerging England that is slowly evolving into a more inclusive and scientifically rational society, and emphasising Darwinian indeterminism, randomness and chance, and rejecting, at least to some extent, teleology (the belief that there is purpose and design in nature). Consistent with Unitarian theology in the nineteenth century, which adopted liberal theology and emphasised rational explanations of the Bible, *Wives and Daughters* deals with these preoccupations of its milieu in the struggle to replace old ways of 'seeing' with new ways of 'organising' knowledge such as evolutionary biology and science. Morris writes: "In a world that seemed no longer governed by Divine Providence but rather by the forces of change and chance, the mid-Victorians constructed a sense of security by reinventing national history as evolutionary progress" (xxviii). Indeed, in a speech given to the Royal Swedish Academy of Science in 1999, Ernst Mayr, a leading evolutionist, notes the shifting world-views that occurred after the publication of *Origin of Species*: "The basic principles proposed by Darwin [were] in total conflict with [the] prevailing ideas . . . of Western man prior to 1859."⁸¹ *Wives and Daughters* needs to be read within this context of paradigmatic change.

⁸¹ See http://www.biologie.uni-hamburg.de/b-online/e36_2/darwin_influence.htm. Web. 20 May 2009. Of course, Mayr's summation is very general. As I noted earlier in this thesis, Darwin was not the first to posit the concept of organic transmutation, especially in scientific and academic circles. However, the publication of his theories in 1859 marked a

It is important, however, not to over-emphasise these changes, particularly in a discussion on Englishness in this period (1848-1865). While, on the one hand, variations in world-views were reflected in changing notions of Englishness, this is not the whole story. It is true that Luke Owen Pike, for example, observed in *The English and Their Origin* (1866) that Darwin's views had begun to modify the racial views of that period (Young, *Ethnicity* 202) and that, to some extent, society moved on, embracing scientific theories of the origin and progress of humankind. In this context, and reflecting Darwinian thinking, theories of racial fusion became more accepted, and the English race was seen to be less 'pure' than previously thought, and certainly not exclusively Saxon. At a local level, however, this shift did not happen overnight. Human attitudes do not necessarily evolve in tandem with philosophical movement, and it seems that, in relation to Englishness, many of the attitudes to race prevalent in the first half of the nineteenth century were still there, although ostensibly in a different wrapper. Even Darwin wrote about the superiority of Saxon genes, stating in *The Descent of Man* in 1871 that "a nation which produced during a lengthened period the greatest number of highly intellectual, energetic, brave, patriotic and benevolent men, would prevail over less favoured nations" (142). Within evolutionary thought, the English race was still able to be seen as evolving more rapidly, having superior survival strategies, and a particular 'destiny' to advance more quickly (Young, *Ethnicity* 203). Despite (or, perhaps, because of) Darwin, the English were still 'on top.'

Gaskell thus both contributed to and used key aspects of the racial discourse of her period to engage with questions about race and Englishness. She challenged prevailing ideas about a 'pure' (and static) Saxonism, and presented, instead, a progressive view of a social

distinct change in public perception of these concepts. It is to this that Mayr refers, and it was within this context in which Gaskell wrote *Wives and Daughters*.

history evolving into a more egalitarian Englishness. In the following chapter I elaborate on Gaskell's racial themes by placing Englishness in Gaskell's fiction within the context of empire, in which she paradoxically affirms England as the centre but denounces, at least in theory, the concept of imperialism. Moreover, while Gaskell's organization of Englishness in the context of empire was middle-class, she had her own peculiar variation of middle-class Englishness; she demonstrated an optimistic view of gradual (evolutionary) change within English society in which middle-class values and behaviour (and hence Englishness) could be learned and achieved by a wider stratum of the English population.

Chapter Two

Out There: The British Empire

Gaskell wrote within a cultural climate that moved away from early nineteenth-century abolitionist discourse – which considered all men, irrespective of race, to be brothers – to what Catherine Hall describes as a more aggressive form of “white kinship” (*Greenland* 218). I suggested in my previous chapter that Gaskell’s progressive historical perspective, of the inevitability of racial and social change, undermined popular notions of England’s Anglo-Saxon identity. In this chapter, I build on this discussion of race by placing Gaskell and Englishness in the context of the British Empire. It was frequently assumed in England in the mid-nineteenth century that an empire was destiny, a natural outcome of the English being a superior race. As I will argue in this chapter, however, the concept of empire was also contested in the nineteenth century. Ian Baucom writes that Englishness “at once . . . embrace[s] and . . . [repudiates] . . . the imperial beyond” (7) and this can also be said of Gaskell’s Englishness. In her earlier fiction such as *Mary Barton* (1848), she depicts an English colony (Canada) favourably, as a pastoral extension of England, whereas in some of her later fiction she creates an opposition between England and its empire. In both *Lois the Witch* (1859) and *Cousin Phillis* (1863), for example, she foregrounds England as the stable centre and English colonies overseas as unstable entities “out there” (CP 323) that are nevertheless also – paradoxically – portrayed as useful in promoting England’s interests.

These interests were largely economic, not least because England needed markets for its factory-produced surpluses. As mentioned in chapter one, commercial success epitomized (in nineteenth-century minds) the height of civilization, and imperial trade was

thought to be a 'natural' ingredient in this success. Gaskell goes along with these assumptions in her writing, taking for granted the rightness and inevitability of imperial trade. Indeed, to some degree, the right of empire was considered so 'natural' for a superior race like the English it was hardly even noticed at 'home' (England) even though the fabric of daily life at this time was shaped and formed by empire (Hall and Rose 2). At the same time, as Pam Morris comments in her Introduction to *Wives and Daughters*, while Gaskell embraces England's imperial activities to some extent, in this novel she also "reveals the cultural loss" (xxxiii) of imperialism. Morris' observation is also important for understanding other works such as *Cousin Phillis*, as I will discuss later.

England's imperial activities were situated within the *British* Empire, and it is necessary here briefly to revisit the concepts of Britishness and Englishness. As I noted in my Introduction these two terms are fluid, slippery and, to some extent, interchangeable, especially in a nineteenth-century context. Moreover, in English minds at least, to be British was to be English and thus, to some extent, the British Empire 'belonged' to England. Gaskell distinguishes between Britain and England by constructing Britain in the context of its geographical/political boundaries (including Scotland and Ireland) as well as its imperial (overseas) interests, whereas she assumes England as the heart (the centre) of these imperial activities. Julie E. Fromer writes that, in the nineteenth century, Great Britain was used when referring to "Britain's political, economic or imperial presence within a global context," but that England was increasingly used to denote national identity (*Deeply Indebted* 543).⁸² It was implicitly assumed that, in ascertaining the 'in group' of Englishness, and, conversely, who is 'other,' England *per se* was not in itself imperial, but, rather, that empire fell within Britain's domain. At the same time England was at the centre of its

⁸² See my Introduction for an elaboration of this point.

imperial activities, with London the largest port in the world and the administrative centre of the British Empire.⁸³ The concept of the 'British Empire' occupied a liminal space, between Englishness and Britishness. Referring to it as the British, rather than, for example, as the *English*, Empire created distance between England and its empire, and yet at the same time there was also inevitable overlap between Britishness and Englishness in relation to empire. As I show in this chapter, Gaskell also distances herself from empire, especially in her later fiction such as *Lois the Witch* and *Cousin Phillis*, and yet, as I will also discuss in chapter three, England (and particularly London) was the heart of the British Empire. As the nineteenth century progressed, it became increasingly difficult to separate in English minds (including Gaskell's) the concepts of England, Britain, and the imperial activities of the British Empire; in many ways, the British Empire was English. I address this tension in this chapter, but return to it in more detail in chapter three.

At this point it is also helpful to clarify what I mean by imperialism and colonialism. I find Edward W. Said's definitions most useful here: "'Imperialism' means the practice, the theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan centre ruling a distant territory; 'colonialism', which is almost always a consequence of imperialism, is the implanting of settlements on distant territory" (*Culture* 8). Imperialism is the overarching ideology of empire, and Gaskell wrote within this ideological context. Moreover, a further distinction can be made between settler colonies and colonies of occupation.⁸⁴ Settler colonies, such as those in Australia, New Zealand, and Northern America, consisted of large numbers of British citizens settling permanently in another land. Their motives for doing so varied, and included economic improvement but also the spreading of English civilization and the

⁸³ In 1850 Britain controlled 40% of the world's merchant shipping tonnage.

⁸⁴ See *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts* (2000) by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin.

Christian religion to other parts of the globe. Colonies of occupation (also known as exploitation colonies), on the other hand, such as India, involved smaller groups (usually traders) whose goal was frequently more singular: making money.⁸⁵

Both types of colonialism feature in Gaskell's writing and Gaskell's attitude towards them is frequently ambivalent and contradictory. Moreover, she does not seem to make the neat distinctions between "settler" and "exploitation" colonies as scholars such as Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin do today, but, rather, lumps the empire into a singular, foreign territorial category of "out there." She uses this phrase specifically in *Cousin Phillis* to denote Canada (CP 323), but implies the same about other imperial destinations such as India. India is, for example, a place in her writing where English men 'disappear' from English domestic settings: it is the last country from which Frank Wilson communicates to his wife before he is (presumed) dead in "The Manchester Marriage" (MM 230), it is where Peter Jenkyns flees in *Cranford* (CD 71), and is, indeed, the place where Gaskell herself lost her beloved brother, John Stevenson, in 1828 (Uglow 53). Gaskell frequently, although not always, depicts the empire in a simple binary relationship with England, as other and "out there;" she generally does not distinguish between differing types of colonies. I follow Gaskell's lead in this depiction of empire, rather than modern postcolonial scholarship, since it contributes to her perceptions of Englishness in her writing. As I argue in relation to *Cousin Phillis*, for example, what happens in India (an 'exploitation colony') affects how Gaskell writes about Canada (a 'settler colony').

Finally, I need to comment on Gaskell's form of Englishness in the context of empire and missions since, as noted above, the growth of the British Empire and the spread of the Christian religion were seen to go together, and, moreover, Gaskell's Englishness cannot be

⁸⁵ For more detail on colonialism see Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (2000).

separated from her own faith, Unitarianism.⁸⁶ This link between empire and missions was noted, for example, in the *Church Missionary Intelligencer*, published in London in 1850: “[England’s] high position amidst the nations of the earth is a providential dispensation. Her vast colonies, her extended influence, her universal commerce, afford astonishing facilities for the wider dissemination of Gospel truth” (qtd. in Bolt 111). The Unitarians, however, did not participate in wide-scale missionary activity. A survey of denominations active in British missions shows that they were largely Protestant: Anglican, Presbyterian, Methodist, and Congregationalist churches (Bolt 111). A notable exception was William Adam, a missionary in India between 1817 and 1838, who began as a Baptist missionary but converted to Unitarianism. After his conversion to Unitarianism, he worked closely with Ram Mohun Roy, also a Unitarian and influential in syncretising Hinduism and Christianity (Landau 205).⁸⁷ Adam lost his financial support from the Baptist Church, however, and was unable to raise financial support from the Unitarian community back in England, and was thus forced to leave India.⁸⁸ This lack of enthusiasm for missionary activity, illustrated both in the dearth of Unitarian missionaries and in the lukewarm response to Adam’s missionary work by the

⁸⁶ For more information on the relationship between missions and empire, see Andrew Porter’s *Religion Versus Empire?* (2004) and *Missions and Empire* edited by Norman Etherington (2005).

⁸⁷ It is not surprising that syncretism between Christian and Hindu belief was initiated by Unitarian missionaries, rather than, for example, staunch (nineteenth-century) Anglicans. This is perhaps explained by the Unitarians’ adoption already in the nineteenth century of liberal theology and a looser adherence to Biblical/Christian creeds and tenets, particularly those concerning the divinity of Jesus Christ, without which the Christian message (and missionary activity) is hollow. This syncretism of Hinduism and Christianity is a consistent outworking of Unitarian belief patterns. Thus, one nineteenth-century journal that defended this perspective was the Unitarian *Prospective Review* which stated in an article “it is regrettable that Christians’ defensiveness and insecurity about their dogma lead them to reject all beliefs but their own as spiritually invalid” and, in defending (Unitarian) Harriet Martineau’s widely criticized *Eastern Life*, wrote that “[Martineau] recognizes the hand of God in everything . . . that *all* faiths are connected in principle” (qtd. in Logan 189).

⁸⁸ See *Dictionary of Unitarian and Universalist Biography* (Web. 10 Nov 2011).

British Unitarian community, helps explain Gaskell's representation of Englishness in the context of empire. It would appear that her Unitarianism diluted her enthusiasm about imperialist activities. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that her writing (including her letters) is silent about missions. She is thus in step with the British Unitarian community which, rather than focusing on imperial activities (such as missions), was at the forefront of political and social reform at home, in England.⁸⁹ This, too, is what prompts Gaskell's plots: her primary concern is with what is happening at 'home,' in the centre, and not about converting pagans and infidels "out there" to Christianity. Gaskell is more concerned with bringing together the various social (and religious) groupings within England itself. The unusual tea party in *North and South* which includes a "Churchwoman . . . [a] Dissenter . . . [and an] Infidel" (NS 215), discussed in more detail in chapter three, is consistent with Gaskell's desire to bring these three groupings together, irrespective of creed. Gaskell's vision of Englishness thus does not concern itself in the first place with peoples living in the empire, but on syncretising social groupings within England itself. This informs her responses to empire.

Racial Discourse and Imperialism

Many in England considered its empire as an inevitable consequence of English superiority, its destiny. This point of view is illustrated in this quotation from the *Quarterly Review* in 1863:

Can we quench the spirit of adventure which burns within the breasts of Englishmen? . . . Can we forbid them to profit by their superiority of skill,

⁸⁹ Notable Unitarians involved in campaigns for social and political reform in England include Joseph Priestly, Jeremy Bentham, Harriet Martineau, James Martineau, John Stuart Mill, and Tom Paine.

intelligence, and industry, or of boldness, combination and defensive courage?

In a word, can we compel the countrymen of Drake, Cavendish, Raleigh, and

Clive to forego the traditions of their race? The thing is wholly impossible. So

long as Englishmen are Englishmen. (qtd. in Morris xxix)

As this quotation also demonstrates, the conquests of empire were an important element in a long history of English heroic exploits, seen in the histories of Drake, Raleigh, and Clive, all sailors, explorers, and traders who brought imperial spoils back to England.⁹⁰ It was generally assumed that, in contrast to other races, the English had a natural instinct for emigration and the acquisition of an empire. A contributor to *The Times* in 1844 writes of “an opportunity of peaceful colonisation as the world has not yet seen . . . We [the Anglo-Saxon race] cannot help breaking our narrow limits and overspreading the world” (qtd. in Young, *Ethnicity* 182). Notions of Englishness were thus inevitably mixed up with colonial expansion; to be English was to spread over the globe. As already mentioned, there was also a religious and moral thrust to this exportation of Englishness, as can be seen in the increased missionary activity during the nineteenth century; however, in general terms the driving force behind imperial Englishness was an economic one, fuelled by a need to find raw materials and overseas markets for the centre.

Many novels of the mid-nineteenth century assume the rightness and inevitability of empire. Said states that novelists before Gaskell (such as Jane Austen in *Mansfield Park*) carefully establish the right for imperial possessions in an effort to establish social order at home in England (Said, *Culture* 73). Similarly, Cannon Schmitt comments that “the presence of Empire insistently marks [novels]” (“Sun and Moon” 17), and Suzanne Daly notes that

⁹⁰ While his name is worthy of inclusion in this list as an example of a great English historical figure, Henry Cavendish’s fame derives not from imperial exploration but rather from scientific discovery.

novels did not merely reflect social norms but “assisted in circulating and crystallizing” them (237). Gaskell reaffirms imperialist ideology in her sympathetic portrayal of John Thornton, the ‘cotton king,’ in *North and South*. Thornton comments to Mr. Hale and his daughter, Margaret, that “[the English] have a wide commercial character to maintain, which makes us into the great pioneers of civilization” (NS 113). Thornton is portrayed as a “new kind of merchant prince,” a link between English imperial trade and English civilization, and his comment reveals Gaskell’s point of view that England’s industrial (and commercial) strength cannot be separated from English imperial power (Perera 48). The steady supply of raw cotton as well as the assurance of markets for the sale of English cotton piece goods was interrelated with English imperial interests.⁹¹ Moreover, implied in this link (of Thornton’s) between England’s industrial strength and pioneering civilization is the view that the progress of global civilization depends on English ingenuity. Robert Knox also expressed this view: “race is everything . . . civilization depend[s] on it” (7). The advance of civilized society by the English race was thus portrayed as closely aligned with imperial venture abroad and industrial strength at home in England.

As I noted in chapter one, Gaskell contradicted Knox’s (pseudo) scientific conclusions about race. According to Leon Litvack, however, it seems that, at least in relation to England’s empire, Gaskell may have agreed with Knox. Litvack observes that in *Wives and Daughters* Gaskell had far more to say on developments in natural science than on imperial conquest: “While Gaskell believed that in writing *Wives and Daughters* she had to map out with great care the scientific debates raging in England in the 1820s and 1830s, she was not impelled to do so for nineteenth century colonial advancement” (757). Noting the contrast between Gaskell’s perspectives on scientific debate and on imperial ideology, Litvack

⁹¹ This concept is explored further in chapter three in the sections on tea and textiles.

concludes that “Gaskell demonstrated, at the very least, a tacit complicity with the imperial project, and so did not think it necessary or appropriate to contradict or adjust prevailing metropolitan sentiments” (757-58). That is, Gaskell accepted the rightness of an empire controlled and dominated by a central government in England, and hence saw it as an “appropriate site for scientific classification [and] mercantile enterprise . . . thus depriving the indigenous inhabitants of modes of expression or adequate means of representation” (Litvack 757). While this is true, in part, it needs also to be noted that Litvack's observations form only part of the picture, since Gaskell both embraces and distances herself from Britain's imperial project. Nevertheless, Litvack's observations are important to my discussion of *Lois the Witch* below.

Francis O'Gorman writes that post-colonial scholars of the 1980s and 1990s, such as Litvack, largely draw on Said's influential *Orientalism* (1978). These scholars assume that there is an inherent bias within imperial ideology towards the (imperial) centre, such as England. Many late twentieth-century works on Victorian literature thus focus on how Victorian novels help perpetuate imperial ideology (O'Gorman, *Victorian Novel* 307). Suvendrini Perera writes, for example, that the Victorian novel reflects imperial ideology by “process[ing] and naturaliz[ing]” this thinking (7). Moreover, Deirdre David argues that a critique of imperialism did not begin until the latter quarter of the nineteenth century, which implies that Gaskell, whose fiction spans the middle years of the century, was not part of this critique (*Rule Britannia* 9).⁹²

I side with more recent scholars who argue that mid-Victorian fiction both extends and critiques imperial ideology. Daniel Bivona, for example, argues that “imperialist

⁹² Other post-colonial scholars of similar persuasion include Gayatri Spivak in her article “Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism” (1985) and Patrick Brantlinger in *Rule of Darkness* (1988).

mentality . . . [was] pervasive but also challenged” (viii). Similarly, Susan Meyer writes that Victorian novels both “question . . . and . . . reaffirm” imperialist ideology (66). Schmitt, too, writes of the “host of difficulties . . . [that] beset[s the] familiar version” that assumes that novels of this period simply “disseminated and naturalized [the British Empire's] correctness, desirability, and inevitability” (“Sun and Moon” 5). Like these scholars, I argue that Gaskell's construction of the British Empire and England's position in it is complex, and, to some extent, ambiguous. Although her fiction does affirm the centre, in the main she does not foreground England in order to legitimize it as the core of a larger imperial enterprise (as Litvack and others assume), but rather does so to emphasise England for its own sake. Gaskell was primarily passionate about England, and, as will be seen, frequently considered the empire as an unnecessary and threatening appendage. At the same time, as I comment in this chapter, and explore in more detail in chapter three on imperial trade, Gaskell was inescapably part of her (imperial) milieu, thus adding to the complexities of constructions of Englishness in the context of empire in her writing.

While British imperialism did become more dominant after the Indian Mutiny (1857), this did not mean that the imperial project was accepted by everyone, and Gaskell was thus not alone in questioning the concept.⁹³ For many in England, particularly those with Whig views, imperialism was a negative term (Young, *Postcolonialism* 34), and Gaskell sided with the Whigs in this issue (Uglow 62). Indeed, imperialist ideology was sufficiently unpopular in England that, especially after William Gladstone became Colonial Secretary in 1845, it was thought inevitable that the empire would eventually dissolve (Young, *Ethnicity* 193). Gladstone, a Liberal, opined that “the lust for territory was one of the greatest curses of

⁹³ The Indian Mutiny (1857) led to the end of commercial rule in India by the British East Indies Company, and resulted in increased centralized governmental control of British dominions such as India (Young, *Postcolonialism* 34).

mankind” (qtd. in Havinden & Meredith 47). Moreover, by the 1860s there was an unhealthy dualism in the British Empire, underpinned by racial ideology and social Darwinism, which included a policy of self-rule for the settler colonies but, at the same time, the exploitation of other colonies such as India. Robert J.C. Young writes that this dualistic division had “the effect of constantly putting the Empire at the edge of dissolution, a doubled or split enterprise never reconciled to itself” (*Postcolonialism* 35). Gaskell’s writing likewise reveals ambivalent, unreconciled attitudes towards imperialism, at times embracing it but also frequently depicting it negatively.

Affirming the Centre in *Lois the Witch*

Despite Gaskell’s ambivalence about empire, and her primary focus on England itself, she still depicted England as the centre of an empire. Young argues that constructions of Englishness in relation to empire were largely defined by the peripheries, that is, the English ‘diaspora’ living away from the mother terrain as they sought to establish their own identity (*Ethnicity* 5-6). London was seen as the centre, the capital of the Anglo-Saxon world, the hub of the comings and goings of its empire. To illustrate this concept of nationality and the centre as defined by the ‘diaspora,’ Benedict Anderson gives the example of a young Massachusetts woman, Mary Rowlandson, who was abducted in 1675 by a group of local Algonquins and Narragansetts. When she later writes of her experience she positions herself as an English woman. Anderson notes the irony of a young woman, who has spent her life in “un-European Massachusetts,” writing about seeing (during this experience) “English Cattle,” an “English Path,” and “deserted English Fields” (61). He writes: “These are not pluckings from the Cotswolds or the Downs – real places . . . but acts of imagination . . . They

are, in a way, getting ready to be 'English' exactly because they are in Massachusetts, not in England" (61). Anderson also notes that Mary Rowlandson's account proved very popular in England and that no less than thirty editions of it had been published by the end of the eighteenth century (61). Colonial representations of Englishness fascinated the English population at home. It also highlights the fact that the concept of Englishness which, as Anderson points out, was largely unconscious within England itself (61), was transmitted to England, and that Mary Rowlandson's revelation of an "unstable Englishness" (Anderson 62) rendered the concept problematic.

Gaskell taps into these imagined but problematic Englishnesses in *Lois the Witch* (1859), set in Salem, Massachusetts, at the time of the Salem witch trials in 1691-92, but she suggests that the 'old' England does not necessarily assimilate the Englishness of the 'new' England. It is possible that Gaskell chose to portray 'new' England in this way because, although there were many English communities around the world by the nineteenth century, the New England set up in the seventeenth century by the Puritans was one of the first sites of English colonization. Gaskell sets up for her middle-class and English audience the idea that, from the outset, the stable centre of English society is the 'old' England, rather than the 'new' England established in English colonies, at least in its American format. While England may not be perfect, the English girl, Lois Barclay, says that "this country [New England] is worse than ever England was" (LtW 153). Gaskell suggests in this that, despite their good intentions, the English colonists did not necessarily construct a more enlightened English society and that, therefore, the answers to the cultural challenges of nineteenth-century England would not necessarily be found away from England's shores.

Lois the Witch outlines the fanatical hunting out and hanging of anyone suspected of witchcraft in Salem's Puritan society which culminates in the hanging of a defenceless and

innocent English girl, Lois Barclay, who has travelled to New England to find sanctuary with her only remaining relatives after the deaths of her parents in England. From the outset of this story, a contrast is set up between the newcomer, the *English* girl, Lois Barclay, and her New England relatives, particularly her aunt, Grace Hickson, who makes no secret of her antipathy towards England and her English niece, that “maiden from another land, who hath brought the errors of that land as a seed with her, even across the great ocean, and who is letting even now the little seeds shoot up into an evil tree, in which all unclean creatures may find shelter” (LtW 128-29). This antipathy towards anything English changes, however, in a moment of extreme crisis, when the first 'witch' is arrested in Salem – a (Native American) *Indian* woman – at which point Grace Hickson suddenly (re)aligns herself with her English forebears, referring to the “religious *English* household” of each Puritan family (LtW 159, emphasis mine). Gaskell thus foregrounds this powerful connection with England in a moment of crisis, in which previous animosities are ignored and a connection to the (English) centre is vital for identity and for survival in a harsh environment. Thus, in moments of stress, when the self is subject to great pressure, Englishness receives primary importance.

Gaskell, however, undermines the settlers' imagined Englishness, their self-connection with their 'mother country' (England), by raising questions for her largely English middle-class audience about the legitimacy of these claims. From the first sentence on, it is clear that this move “from Old to New England” (LtW 105) will not be a good one for Lois. She needs to steady herself on what ought to be firm land – “solid earth” (LtW 105) – as she observes the strangeness of the terrain. Later, this paragraph states that “her heart sank a little” (LtW 105), adding to the foreshadowing that this move to 'new' England may not have a happy outcome. Moreover, Gaskell counterpoints 'old' and 'new' England in various

ways. She distinguishes between the landscape of 'old' England, full of colourful flowers and grassy meadows, and the dark green, foreboding forests that encircle the point of entry into 'new' England, Boston. She also highlights the alien spiritual environment that Lois is "let down into[:] . . . Puritan peculiarities . . . sufficient to make her feel very lonely and strange" (LtW 112). Moreover, the narrator points out that Lois is English no less than thirty times and appears to be at pains to constantly remind the reader that this 'witch' is English (and Anglican, with a history that can be traced to the Church Fathers) and not American (and Puritan). This English girl, then, is depicted as sucked into the vortex of social lunacy in 'new' England, complete with Manasseh Hickson's increasing displays of madness, which climaxes in Lois' condemnation as a witch.

Gaskell thus reaffirms the centre in *Lois the Witch* by implying that, while the 'diaspora' might identify with England, those living in England do not necessarily reciprocate these feelings. Gaskell similarly distances herself from England's imperial activities in a letter written in 1861 during the American Civil War to Charles Eliot Norton, in which she engages in a conversation about the American situation. She states: "I should have thought . . . that separating yourselves from the South was like getting rid of a diseased member" (*Letters* 655). In this letter she assumes that she, being "average English," provides a commonly-accepted perspective, as she compares the severing of the American north from its southern states with Britain cutting off political ties with its colonies. She writes:

And yet you say in this letter 'I do not feel sure that under *any* circumstances the *right* of secession could or would have been allowed' &c[.] You will perhaps say that our great unwieldy British Empire coheres that the Roman did (sic) – yes, but we do not come in frequent contact with our colonies, – as you North and South do. People of {all} diametrically opposite opinions on many points may

keep good friends if they are not brought into intimate daily communion. Doubtless a good quantity of grumbling goes on, both with just and unjust causes, at our antipodes, at our government of them; but we do not hear it 'hot and hot'. – (Besides I heartily wish our colonies would take to governing themselves, & *sever the connexion* with us in a comfortable friendly way.) So that altogether I (average English) cannot understand how you (American) did not look forward to 'secession' at some time not very far distant. (*Letters* 655, emphasis mine)

Gaskell not only presents her view on the American Civil War, but reveals an aspect of Englishness common in England in the mid-nineteenth century.⁹⁴ While most of the Australian colonies as well as New Zealand (England's antipodes) had self-government by the time that she wrote this letter, other colonies were still under direct English control at this time, and she taps into a not uncommon perception of her period, that it was impossible to rule the settler colonies from the centre.⁹⁵ Gaskell's comment to Norton reveals that, while she views the empire as an inescapable part of English life, in her opinion she (and England) would be the happier without it, particularly if this severance would be

⁹⁴ Gaskell misunderstands America's federal form of government. The Confederate states were not colonies of the Northern states, and thus her comparison of the American Civil War with England and its colonies is flawed. Nevertheless, her comments to Norton reveal her ambivalence towards British imperialism.

⁹⁵ Young notes that this thinking developed after the loss of the American colonies. He views 1776 as pivotal in the development of free trade and the federation of self-governing Anglo-Saxon communities (*Postcolonialism* 34). Somewhat perversely, there was at the same time nationalistic pride in England of its Anglo-Saxon margins. Charles Dilke, for example, a nineteenth-century historian, celebrated "England around the world," creating the concept of 'Greater Britain' consisting of a racially cohesive Anglo-Saxon diaspora, and J.R. Seeley, an Oxford scholar, who wrote *The Expansion of England* in 1871, portrayed colonial expansion as being central to England's identity and history (Young, *Postcolonialism* 35-37). Similarly, J.A. Froude wrote of the British Empire being held together by "common blood, common interest, and a common pride" (Young, *Postcolonialism* 37).

done in a “comfortable friendly way.” In this sense, therefore, Gaskell did not participate in the imperial project described by Litvack. While, as has been seen in the above discussion on *Lois the Witch*, Gaskell did, at least to some extent, reinforce England as the centre, at the same time her ambivalence towards Britain's empire leads to a question: of what would England be the centre if this peaceful severance that Gaskell desires occurs? The answer is: the centre of the civilized world, irrespective of whether it has an empire appended to it, or not.

Notwithstanding Gaskell's comment to Norton, the reality of the empire remained, and, as Hall and Rose point out, Gaskell, as much as anybody else in England at that time, was inevitably affected in many ways by England's empire (*At Home* 20-21). Thus, in wanting to “sever the connexion [with our colonies],” Gaskell also reaffirms England as the centre by implying that, to be truly English, a person needs to live within the boundaries of this centre, in England. Ian Baucom writes that from the nineteenth century on, “Englishness has been *generally* understood to reside within some type of imaginary, abstract, or actual locale, and to mark itself upon that locale's familiars” (4). Gaskell located her version of Englishness very firmly in England itself. I have already discussed how this can be concluded from *Lois the Witch*, but she did so in a variety of other ways, too. Early nineteenth-century fictional works were primarily interested in place, and the location of the story operated to demarcate clear lines of what was “non-British” or “un-English” (Perera 35). Perera reflects on the construction of a “green and rural core, which serves as a touchstone of the truly 'English'” (35). Gaskell focuses on this “green and rural core” in several of her stories.⁹⁶

⁹⁶ Gary Kelly notes the influence of Mary Mitford's *Our Village: Sketches of Rural Character and Scenery* (1820) on Victorian writers, including Elizabeth Gaskell (202). He writes that *Our Village* “helped to define . . . an emergent vision of rural England as the ‘real’ England, the essential England, but a rural England relatively free from the class conflict, mass economic

Green and Rural Core in *Mary Barton*: Amalgamating England and Canada

Mary Barton is primarily an industrial novel,⁹⁷ but it begins and ends with a glimpse of England's "green and rural core," first with a description of Green Heys Fields, portrayed as a pleasant, park-like setting which Manchester's working classes visit in their time off work, and concluding with a pastoral scene of a working-class family now living in an 'English' setting in colonial Canada.⁹⁸ Gaskell suggests that the working classes portrayed in both these rural scenes ought to be included in the 'in group' of Englishness in the nineteenth century, and also that, unlike the New English community in *Lois the Witch*, depicted as alien and 'other,' the Canadian colony, as an extension of England in this novel, fits comfortably within the locale of her Englishness.

Gaskell stretches the realism in the passage on Green Heys Fields, however, since it is doubtful that the working-classes had opportunity for this kind of recreation. Gaskell's account differs, for example, from that of her contemporary, Dr. J.P. Kay, who wrote: "At present [the 1830s] the entire labouring population is without any season of recreation and is ignorant of . . . amusements. Healthful exercise in the open-air is seldom or never taken by the artisans of this town, and their health certainly suffers from this deprivation" (qtd. in Bland 58-60).⁹⁹ Despite Kay's observations, D.S. Bland defends Gaskell. He argues that the working-classes may have had opportunity to walk in the clean country air at least once in

hardships, and brutalizing labour increasingly seen as typical of the industrial towns" (202). I agree with Kelly but would add that Gaskell modifies her views on rural England.

⁹⁷ Industrial novels, also known as condition-of-England novels, were written in the Victorian period and generally set in the 1840s and 50s.

⁹⁸ Green Heys Fields was situated south of the city beyond Chorlton-on-Medlock and consisted mainly of smaller farms. It is currently in Manchester's suburb of Hulme which includes Greenheys Lane (Wilkes 364, n9).

⁹⁹ Dr. Kay later became Sir James Kay-Shuttleworth, and was a friend of Gaskell's.

the 1830s since they were granted a holiday on the day of Queen Victoria's coronation in 1838, and that Gaskell may well have been alluding to this event (60). Victoria's coronation, however, was in June, whilst this first chapter of *Mary Barton* commences in "early May . . . the April of the poets" (MB 6). Furthermore, it is doubtful that this novel's beginning was the year of Victoria's coronation. It commences "ten or a dozen years ago" and, since Gaskell began writing it in 1845, its setting is more likely to be somewhere between 1833 and 1835.¹⁰⁰ This is consistent with the events surrounding the Chartist petition in chapter eight (which occurred in England in the spring of 1839), four or five years after this episode at Green Heys Fields. Louis M. Hayes also doubts that working-classes thronged Green Heys Fields. In his *Reminiscences of Manchester and Some of its Local Surroundings from 1840*, he remembers a growing appreciation for recreation in the clean air of rural areas skirting Manchester, but limits his comments to the middle-classes, and not the working-classes (51). This opening scene of *Mary Barton* is largely an imaginary construct.

Gaskell may have made this up because Green Heys Fields was well-known to her middle-class audience and is thus a scene with which it could identify. Being familiar with Manchester's dirty factory air, the middle classes were nostalgic for England's verdant fields, as could be seen in their residential migration to the outskirts of Manchester. Gaskell feeds this nostalgia by writing about it in her descriptions of Green Heys Fields: "there is a charm about them which . . . contrast[s] . . . with the busy, bustling manufacturing town" (MB 5). The prettiness of this scene is emphasised in the description of the farmhouse porch "covered by a rose-tree; . . . [and] the little garden . . . crowded with a medley of old-

¹⁰⁰ In the Preface to her first edition of *Mary Barton* in 1848, Gaskell wrote, "Three years ago I became anxious (from circumstances that need not be more fully alluded to) to employ myself in writing a book of fiction . . . I bethought me how deep might be the romance of those who elbowed me daily in the busy streets of the town where I resided" (MB 3).

fashioned herbs and flowers . . . roses, lavender, sage, balm (for tea), rosemary, pinks and wallflowers, onions and jessamine" (MB 6). Moreover, by constructing the working-classes (in this middle-class setting) as regular, law-abiding citizens enjoying a day in the country, Gaskell demands of her middle-class audience that the working classes as well as anyone else should have these opportunities, fitting into Gaskell's notions of an Englishness that included the working classes. Gaskell emphasises this by setting this story in "an early May evening – the April of the poets." Not only is this an allusion to *The Canterbury Tales*, as it has generally been interpreted,¹⁰¹ but, as Jennifer Foster in the Broadview edition of *Mary Barton* points out, this phrase may also allude to Robert Browning's poem, "Home Thoughts, from Abroad," published in 1845, the year that Gaskell began writing this novel.¹⁰² Browning writes nostalgically of England in this poem: "O to be in England/Now that April's there" (ll. 1-2). Browning continues this poem by describing the physical beauty of springtime in England. Thus, situating the working-classes within the idyllic, rural setting of Green Heys Fields strongly suggests that, if they are not there in reality, they ought to be. They, too, are part of England. This raises a question, however, as to whether the working-classes wanted to be portrayed in this pastoral context since many of them had unpleasant memories of agricultural life, one reason for their mass migration to urban areas such as Manchester. To some extent, then, Gaskell imposes her middle-class notions of Englishness onto Manchester's urban poor.

¹⁰¹ See, for example, the following editions of *Mary Barton*: Penguin Classics, edited by Daly Macdonald (1996), and Chatto & Pickering, edited by Joanne Wilkes (2005).

¹⁰² Browning moved in similar literary circles to Gaskell. For example, Gaskell and Browning shared a literary agent, John Forster, an influential reader for publishers Chapman and Hall. It is uncertain whether Gaskell and Browning met prior to their meeting in Italy in 1857, although there is evidence of Gaskell corresponding with Browning's wife, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, in 1853 after the publication of *Ruth*.

There is a contrast in *Mary Barton* that is similar to the contrast between 'old' and 'new' England in *Lois the Witch*; that is, the nostalgic portrayal in *Mary Barton* of a peaceful, agrarian former way of life and the interminable clatter of the present (urban, industrialised, working-class) England. *Lois the Witch* also includes an idyllic garden setting, the parsonage “covered with Austrian roses and yellow jessamine” (LtW 106) as an image of ‘old’ England. At the risk of reducing the complexities of these opposites, there is a parallel between the differences posed between the 'old', peaceful, rural, green England, and the 'new,' threatening England, be it in the American colonies or in working-class, industrial Manchester. Whilst Gaskell begins *Mary Barton* with the scenes described above – albeit with hints of social rupture in the discussion about the mysterious disappearance of Mrs. Barton's ‘fallen’ sister, Esther – followed by a hearty “Manchester tea-party” in chapter two, the rest of the novel is largely about the miseries of the working classes. Gaskell hints in this that, whilst Englishness lies very much within the domestic space of England, the insecurity of working-class existence creates a self/other dichotomy within this setting. The social divisions within England itself thus render neat demarcations between England and its empire as, at best, problematic. This is reflected in racial overtones in social commentary in the mid-nineteenth century, such as Henry Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor* (1851), and that of George Sims, who wrote in 1881 of “the dark continent that is within easy walking distance of the General Post Office” (qtd. in Baucom 61), in which the working-classes occupy an “unexplored, uncivilized, and colonial space” (Baucom 61). Sims and Mayhew imply that there is similarity between England's domestic, working-class space and the space occupied by the overseas empire. Gaskell questions these racially imbued views of England's working classes since in her view there should not be this self/other dichotomy within England's domestic space. She therefore highlights these social divisions in *Mary*

Barton and her other fiction by bringing her middle-class audience into contact with working-class issues, in order to, as John Thornton says towards the end of *North and South*, “attach class to class as they should be attached” (NS 391). Gaskell’s vision is thus to ameliorate this dichotomy so that England’s spatial boundaries come together under a single and inclusive form of Englishness.

Mary Barton’s account of working-class life is sandwiched between two pastoral idylls. Not only does the first chapter begin with a pastoral scene, but the novel concludes in a similar setting, albeit this time in colonial Canada, where, unlike the dark and forbidding American forest in *Lois the Witch*, the landscape is transformed into an English Arcadia. The setting of this final scene is described as follows:

I see a long, low wooden house, with room enough and to spare. The old primeval trees are felled and gone for many a mile around; one alone remains to overshadow the gable-end of the cottage. There is a garden around the dwelling, and far beyond that stretches an orchard. The glory of an Indian summer is over all, making the heart leap at the sight of its gorgeous beauty.
(MB 392)

To some extent, the novel has come full circle: this latter description is not unlike the English landscape described in its first chapter. This is not, therefore, a new, refashioned England, as was attempted by the Puritans in America in *Lois the Witch*, but an extension of the centre, the 'old' England, described by Perera as in “the same spatial relationship” (52). Various scholars comment that Gaskell’s original notes, in which she plans to have Jem and Mary sail for America, may have indicated her intention to send them to the United

States,¹⁰³ but, as Diana Archibald comments, “it seems probable that she ultimately rejected the States as a destination, primarily because such a move would have taken Jem and Mary out of the British Empire, thus severing the bonds of loyalty to England itself” (36). Archibald cites a letter written to the editor of the *London Daily Telegraph*, which recommended emigration to Canada for “practical men who are now struggling at home,” to a land “a country more like our own” (qtd. in Archibald 37). Thus, unlike the America described in *Lois the Witch*, in which the dark, untamed forest looms forebodingly, “tangled into heavy darkness” (LtW 117), the “old primeval trees” of the English Canadian side of the North American continent have been cut down, and the land is, instead, portrayed as domesticated, pre-industrial, and full of optimism, warmth, beauty, and light. This latter point concerning light is reinforced in the concluding section of this scene (and the novel), in which it is disclosed that the formerly blind Margaret Legh has been “couched and can see as well as ever” (MB 393), and is about to move to Canada newly wedded to Will Wilson.

This emphasis on light provides an optimistic ending to *Mary Barton*, causing some scholars to be critical of this migration solution at the end of what is in many ways a dark novel.¹⁰⁴ As Perera points out, however, *Mary Barton* was written and set in the period of Chartist unrest, which coincided with a period of intense debate about migration (53).¹⁰⁵ Thomas Carlyle, for example, influenced by Malthusian theories of overpopulation, wrote in *Chartism* (1840) of filling “a whole vacant Earth” (65). In this context, Carlyle writes

¹⁰³ These scholars include Diana Archibald (2002), Angus Easson (1979), and Stephen Gill (1970).

¹⁰⁴ Scholars critical of the migration solutions of various mid-nineteenth century novels, including *Mary Barton*, include Gillian Beer (“Carlyle and *Mary Barton*,” 1978) and Raymond Williams (1983). Beer writes about *Mary Barton*: “Escape, not transformation, is seen as the only true record of what currently is being performed in society . . . [Gaskell] doesn’t pretend to have solved society, only her novel” (248).

¹⁰⁵ Chartism was a working-class labour movement (c1836-1850) which aimed to achieve social change through political intervention.

glowingly of (working-class) emigration to Canada: "Canadian forests stand unfelled . . . cry[ing] out to be settled by the Englishman" (*Chartism* 67).¹⁰⁶ Moreover, immigration to Canada solved not only problems at home but also in Canada. The Lord Durham Report of 1839, for example, observed ethnic issues in Canada between the English and French settlers. Durham assessed these issues within the racial discourse of his period, and concluded that, in contrast to English superiority, the French had failed to demonstrate social and economic progress. The Report subsequently recommended the mass migration of British settlers to Canada so that these would quickly outnumber the French settlers. This took place particularly in the years leading up to the four Canadian provinces receiving responsible self-government in 1848-49 when it was assumed that the ethnic issues between the English and the French had been resolved, in part because of the immigration project in the 1840s. This ending to *Mary Barton* is not, therefore, simply an easy way out of a plot conundrum – what to do with Jem and Mary so that they live happily ever after – but presents a realistic solution to industrial issues of the mid-nineteenth century, in which England was extended to include settler colonies such as Canada, which, in turn, would welcome working-class English settlers. The irony in this, particularly in a discussion of Englishness, is that folk such as Jem Wilson and Mary Barton can only become part of England's "green and pleasant land"¹⁰⁷ once they leave working-class misery behind. It is only in Canada that they can be truly English. Unlike the narrator of Browning's poem who

¹⁰⁶ The variation between the felled primeval trees in *Mary Barton* and Carlyle's unfelled Canadian forests can be explained by the eight years that separates these two accounts (1840 to 1848) and the increased timber importation by England from Eastern Canada (500,000 loads in 1840, increasing to 750,000 loads in 1846). See The Canadian Encyclopaedia. Web. 6 Feb. 2012. Moreover, Carlyle's comment is also a general reflection of the vast amount of land available for English settlement.

¹⁰⁷ The phrase "green and pleasant land" is from a section in William Blake's "Milton a Poem" (1804-1810), subtitled "Jerusalem."

wishes to be 'home' in England, Jem and Mary create their English home abroad. A further irony in *Mary Barton*'s conclusion is that Jem Wilson takes with him and employs the manufacturing skills of industrial England, which were being established in Canada at that time, thus threatening to destroy this pastoral idyll, as it had already happened in England itself (Archibald 58). This theme of altering forever the pastoral landscape of England is further explored in *Cousin Phillis*, published in 1863-64.

Green and Rural Core in *Cousin Phillis*: Separating England and Canada

Like *Mary Barton*, *Cousin Phillis* also includes migration from England to Canada. In this story, however, Gaskell is far less sympathetic towards Canada, and places markers of separation between the centre and its periphery. Indeed, in *Cousin Phillis* the pastoral/industrial dichotomy is reversed, with the pastoral idyll firmly situated within England's geographical boundaries, and industry positioned in the context of building railways in Canada. This novella records the development of young, sexually-innocent Phillis Holman, who lives a quiet life in a state of perpetual childhood with her protective parents, and who is introduced, through her cousin, Paul Manning, the story's narrator, to Edward Holdsworth, a railway engineer. The story tells of Holdsworth's wooing of Phillis, of his sudden summons to build a railway in Canada, and of his leaving England without saying goodbye to Phillis or her family, but with the unspoken intention of returning to marry her. Phillis pines because of Holdsworth's absence, and only becomes aware of Holdsworth's love for her after Manning tells her about it, at which news she perceptibly blossoms until she hears of Holdsworth's marriage in Canada to a French-Canadian woman, Lucille Ventadour. Phillis has a complete breakdown at this news, and only recovers because of the kind but blunt words of the family's old servant, Betty, after which the story quickly

concludes with Phillis' plans to visit Manning's family, "for a change of thought and scene" (CP 354), before returning "to the peace of the old days" (CP 354), which, she firmly asserts, "I can, and I will!" (CP 354).

Despite Phillis' confidence that she can revert to the peace of former days, the English pastoral idyll in this novella is irrevocably broken, at least in part, by one of England's peripheries, Canada. In *Cousin Phillis* Gaskell presents a Canada quite unlike the one referred to in *Mary Barton*, "a country . . . like our own [England]" (Archibald 37). A possible reason for this is that in England public attention on Canada had abated somewhat by the 1860s when Gaskell wrote *Cousin Phillis*. Whereas in the 1840s, in the wake of the Durham Report and leading up to responsible government in the Canadian provinces by 1849, concerted attention was given to extending Englishness in Canada through mass migration, this drive had lessened by the time that *Cousin Phillis* was published in 1863-64. The Quebec Conference (1864) put in place what would become the Dominion of Canada in 1867, all four provinces peacefully severing, at least in part, from Britain to form a single nation. In so doing, Canada moved on from being "a country . . . like our own" to a country in its own right. Thus we can see Gaskell responding to specific, shifting historical circumstances in her ongoing and continually changing constructions of what it meant to be English.

Changes in Canada's relationship with Britain contributed to the differences in the ways that Canada is presented in Gaskell's first novel, *Mary Barton*, published in 1848 and set in 1837-1842, and one of her final works, *Cousin Phillis*, published fifteen years later in 1863-64. The shift between these two stories did not, however, take place only in the realm of English/Canadian social and political relations, but also reflects a shift in Gaskell's thinking about England in relation to its empire at that time. In *Mary Barton*, pre-industrial Canada is portrayed as English, but, in *Cousin Phillis*, Canada is described as "out there" (CP 323), "an

out-of-the-way place" (CP 328), and not as an extension of England as it had been in *Mary Barton*. Moreover, the English man who moves to Canada (Holdsworth) is portrayed as not quite English. He cuts his hair "foreign fashion" (CP 300), attributed to his having lived in Italy for two years, a "queer, outlandish place" (CP 283). After her first meeting with Holdsworth, Phillis remarks to Manning: "I like an Englishman to look like an Englishman" (CP 300), implying that Holdsworth does not. Additionally, but no less crucially, Holdsworth does not marry Phillis the English rose but a foreign, French Canadian, Lucille Ventadour, who is almost certainly a Catholic. In Lucille, then, Gaskell creates a character (not unlike Aimée in *Wives and Daughters*) with overwhelming markers of someone who is un-English. Earlier, Holdsworth writes appreciatively to Manning of the Ventadours' "foreign element retained in their characters and manner of living" (CP 328-29). Gaskell thus cuts the foreign-looking Holdsworth adrift: he is not portrayed as an English man within England's colony. Instead, she has him marry a foreigner and, moreover, adds that he speaks that foreigner's French language, too, (CP 341). Consequently, Holdsworth does not extend England into Canada as Jem and Mary do in *Mary Barton*; instead, his mixed marriage creates a hybrid, something new and un-English, in this settler colony.

On one level, it can be argued that since *Cousin Phillis* was published after Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859), this novella portrays an evolving, hybridizing Englishness, as Gaskell does, for example, in her depiction of Osborne Hamley's marriage in *Wives and Daughters* to Aimée.¹⁰⁸ *Cousin Phillis*, however, has an added dimension, that of un-Englishness situated outside England's physical boundaries, in Canada. Further, in this context, Canada is not portrayed as a Utopian extension of England's borders, as in *Mary Barton*, but as foreign

¹⁰⁸ See chapter one for a more extensive discussion on the racial/social implications of Osborne Hamley's marriage.

and “out there.” Why does Gaskell separate England and its empire in *Cousin Phillis*, and what implications does this have for Gaskell’s constructions of Englishness? In answering these questions, Gaskell’s comment about the British Empire in her letter to Charles Eliot Norton in 1861 is significant. As I noted earlier in this chapter, she writes that “I heartily wish our colonies would take to governing themselves, & sever the connexion with us” (*Letters* 655), thereby indicating her personal lack of enthusiasm for the empire. Keeping in mind Gaskell’s optimistic portrayal of Canada in *Mary Barton*, it is pertinent to ask why this change of heart may have occurred. There are two main reasons, one political and one personal.

A crucial date not only in England’s development concerning empire but also in that of the Gaskells’ lives personally was 1857, the year of the Indian Mutiny. This uprising against the British East India Company erupted after years of pent-up frustration on the part of the Bengal army attached to the Company, and was precipitated by rumours (which turned out to be true) that recently acquired Enfield muskets were greased with either pork or beef fat, this being religious and cultural anathema to Muslims and Hindus respectively. Written accounts of this conflict, which included stories of the sexual violation of British women, were widely circulated in England, and were greeted with alarm by the English public. Gaskell “gulped . . . down” Harriet Martineau’s *British Rule in India* (1857), one of the public sources of information of the (supposed) atrocities committed against British women and children in India (Uglow 438). Martineau writes of this as an English calamity, and analyses it in racial terms: “[a] bottomless chasm yawns between the interior nature of the Asiatic and the European races” (296). Once the British had regained control of the area, India was no longer considered as a commercial outpost, but was reorganised under the British crown and became part of the British Empire. India’s “interior nature” could no longer be trusted

by English men and women because, in English minds at least, Asiatic races had proven false by attacking 'innocent' English people. Young writes that 1857 was a turning point in British imperialism, where the varying elements of settler colonies and commercial outposts came under the central control of the imperial centre (*Postcolonialism* 34). While this period also included nationalistic jingoism such as J.A. Froude's maxim of the empire consisting of "common blood, common interest, and a common pride" (qtd. in Young, *Postcolonialism* 37), there was increased tension in England after 1857 about its expanding imperial enterprises and, due to the widespread publicity of the Indian Mutiny, an increased anxiety about the foreign elements of empire (Rendall 118). The Indian Mutiny revealed a "fragility of British imperial rule to a generation of Victorians for whom the power of the Raj had appeared untouchable" (Burton 215).¹⁰⁹ Gaskell, too, was affected by a darker side to the empire.

These political concerns about India were exacerbated at the personal level since the Gaskells were linked to India through family and friends. They were horrified to learn of the murder of their close friends, Colonel and Mrs. Ewart, and their young daughter, in the Cawnpore massacre (*Letters* 468, Uglow 439). Moreover, they had further links with India via the Clive family. Sir Robert Clive, popularly known as Clive of India, a key player in the founding of British India in the mid-eighteenth century, was distantly related to the Hollands, Gaskell's mother's family, as well as to Gaskell's husband, William (Clive's mother was a Gaskell). Gaskell refers in a letter in 1849 to going to a lecture in Manchester on Clive. She also recounts in this letter some of the family memories of Clive's youthful exploits (*Letters* 75-6). Notwithstanding these family connections, however, Gaskell's knowledge of

¹⁰⁹ Other historians who mark this shift in 1857 in the English public's views on the Empire include Christine Bolt (1971), Sara Suleri (1992), and Claire Midgley (2006).

India was presumably in the realm of adventure tales of English exploits, fed by family lore and, additionally, by the mystery surrounding the unexplained death of her dearly-loved brother, John, a mariner, whose last letter to Gaskell in 1820 was “almost all about India . . . [a] long and highly coloured [epistle]” (Chapple, *Early Years* 230). Gaskell herself wrote in 1857 to her publisher (of the *Cornhill Magazine*), George Smith, that “I never had a notion of India in any way, – I did not know there were three presidencies till about two months ago; and as for whether the natives are white green or blue I know nothing, so that we are now going to read and learn as much as we can” (*Letters* 462). Gaskell’s innocent view of India and hence of the empire was destroyed when she, together with the English public, learned of the brutalities of the Indian Mutiny. The empire was no longer merely exotic and the stuff of adventure stories. This may well have been a factor in Gaskell becoming more insular in her notions of Englishness in relation to empire, retreating into a safe English domestic space in *Cousin Phillis*.

An additional personal connection to India in 1857 was the engagement in this same year of the Gaskells' second daughter, Meta, to Captain Charles Hill, an officer of the British Army, whose furlough was immediately recalled at the outbreak of tensions in India. This caused quite a flutter in the Gaskell household. The engagement was, as observed by Uglow, “a shock to Elizabeth” and a source of bemusement to her friends (438). Altogether, as Gaskell wrote to George Smith, “the engagement is a most anxious one” (*Letters* 463). What transpired, however, was not dissimilar to what Gaskell would include a number of years later in the plot of *Cousin Phillis*:¹¹⁰ once Meta's fiancée was away from England, and

¹¹⁰ Alan Shelston makes a similar connection between Meta’s engagement (and what followed) and the plot of *Cousin Phillis* in his *Brief Lives: Elizabeth Gaskell* (2010), 84.

“out there” in the empire, Captain Hill proved to be as unreliable as Edward Holdsworth in *Cousin Phillis*.¹¹¹

There are further striking similarities between Meta Gaskell and Phillis Holman. When Meta learned of Captain Hill's perfidies and consequently broke off the engagement, she went into a period of about two years of severe emotional decline, as Phillis also does. Further, Meta never married but devoted her life to social work amongst the poor (Uglow 446), something that Gaskell initially planned for Phillis. In December 1863, Gaskell wrote to her publisher, George Smith, who was wanting to bring *Cousin Phillis* to a close, that she wanted to extend the plot by concluding it “years later” with a still unmarried Phillis buried in social work, nursing those with typhus fever, “making practical use of the knowledge learned from Holdsworth and, with the help of common labourers, levelling & draining the undrained village – a child (orphaned by fever) in her arms another plucking at her gown” (*Further Letters* 259-60). By 1863, when *Cousin Phillis* was published, Meta was almost twenty-seven and had by then had considerable experience in helping the poor during the Manchester cotton famine, 1861-65 (Uglow 503). Moreover, much earlier, in 1854, Gaskell had encouraged Meta to train as a nurse once she turned thirty years of age (*Letters* 320). Whilst she never did do formal nursing training, Meta did nurse many of the working-class poor in Manchester who suffered from typhus, a disease that accompanied the overcrowding and poor sanitation of that period. Like the Phillis of the planned (but never executed) ending, Meta was much-loved in her community, which is clear in an issue of *The Morning Chronicle* that noted her death in 1913: “Many Englishwomen of our time have

¹¹¹ Walter Bagehot referred in a letter to ‘both pecuniary laxity and systematic profligacy’ in relation to Hill, and that another correspondent mentioned ‘amours and natural children’. The rumours that Meta had heard were about Hill’s gambling, not paying his debts, and his untruthfulness when confronted with these rumours (Uglow 446).

earned wider fame, but few lived more remarkable or more fruitful lives than Miss M.E. Gaskell.”¹¹² Meta was the real-life embodiment of the Phillis Gaskell planned to create but was unable to, due to her publisher’s impatience to get the story finished.

Notwithstanding that some of the overlap between Meta and Phillis developed after the publishing of *Cousin Phillis*, the seeds of disaffection with the empire were already sown by 1863, five years after the events of the Indian Mutiny which served to reinforce for Gaskell the volatility and uncertainty of life in the empire. These thoughts come together in *Cousin Phillis*, where England is depicted as the pastoral idyll and the empire, in this case Canada, as the unpredictable realm outside England’s boundaries, which, in turn, destabilizes the centre. Holdsworth may represent the empire but he falls outside the boundaries of what constitutes Englishness. Both in terms of public imagination and Gaskell’s personal experience, the empire had become unstable. England, on the other hand, was not. Less than a year after writing *Cousin Phillis*, Gaskell constructed another character who travels overseas but does not degenerate into un-English attitudes or behaviour: Roger Hamley in *Wives and Daughters*. While Roger travels outside England’s boundaries, he is first carefully drawn as solid, reliable, dependable, fit, and healthy, ‘essential’ qualities for an Englishman.¹¹³ It is also significant that *Wives and Daughters* is subtitled, “An Every-Day Story,” immediately setting it within the domestic space of England. Thus, any references to imperial activities are scant. Gaskell provides few details about this exploration, preferring to focus instead on what is happening in England itself.¹¹⁴ Thus, by the 1860s, Gaskell constructs England as the firm, steady centre and the outside

¹¹² See: <http://www.elizabethgaskellhouse.org/family>. Web. 21 July 2010.

¹¹³ This does not prevent him from succumbing to illness whilst in Africa, although he does recover.

¹¹⁴ See Litvack (2004) and Amy King’s introduction to *Wives and Daughters* (2005).

world (including the British Empire) as unreliable at best, thus illustrating her wish expressed to Eliot Norton in 1861 that England and the empire “sever the connexion.” While English colonists (the English ‘diaspora’) may have defined themselves in relation to the centre, England, particularly in moments of crisis, Gaskell, writing from within the centre, suggests that this imagined relationship was challenged by those living within England itself.

At the same time, while Gaskell may have wanted to “sever the connexion,” this was easier said than done, particularly because the empire was not only “out there” but also part of the very fabric that made up England in the mid-nineteenth century. Thus, even within the “every-day story” of *Wives and Daughters*, as well as Gaskell’s other fiction, England’s domestic space is interwoven with an “imperial presence” (Hall and Rose 2), and this connection will be the focus of my next chapter.

Chapter Three

Three Strand Cord: Tea, Opium, and Cotton

“What are we English? Does anyone know?” Thus far, I have argued that Gaskell interrogates the presumed Englishness of her period by wrestling with the place of the ‘other’ within England. She questions, for example, the assumed superiority of the Anglo-Saxon race and the related view that an empire is the ‘destiny’ of such a superior race, and adds her voice to the developing perspective in the nineteenth century that England’s identity as purely Anglo-Saxon is but a misguided ideal. Gaskell presents a ‘progressive’ view of history in which English society moves inexorably towards ‘civilization.’ Moreover, again as a Unitarian, she grasped the possibilities inherent within scientific inquiry in the nineteenth century, particularly evolutionist theory (as presented by Charles Darwin, for example), seeing this as a key to explain social progression towards a more inclusive society which until then had placed Unitarians (and others) outside notions of Englishness. Moreover, as a Unitarian, Gaskell did not share her compatriots’ vision of having an empire in order to spread not only English civilization but also the Christian religion. She became increasingly insular, seeing the empire as a threatening appendage and favouring, instead, England itself.

In this (and the following) chapter I will argue that Gaskell’s main love for England rather than the empire “out there” (CP 323) resulted in her primary focus being on social change within England, most notably that excluded ‘others’ might be included in the sense of Englishness of this period. At the same time, there was an inevitable interconnection between England’s domestic setting and its empire. As Catherine Hall and Sonya Rose argue

convincingly, daily life in Britain had an “imperial presence” (*At Home* 2); interwoven into an “every-day story” such as *Wives and Daughters*, for example, is British imperial activity.¹¹⁵ I will investigate how this interweaving of the empire into everyday experience affected Gaskell’s constructions of Englishness, and will do so by focusing on the impact of three imperial products on England (and on its British counterparts), namely, tea, cotton, and opium. England’s need for markets for the vast quantities of cotton items manufactured in English factories resulted in the opening up of markets in India for these items, which frequently paid for these products in opium. In turn, the English exchanged their recently-acquired opium for Chinese tea (there being little demand for English cotton in China at that time, but no lack of demand for opium); hence the interconnection between these three elements of imperial trade.¹¹⁶

In my discussion of the impact of these products on English society, I will foreground a major contradiction in Gaskell’s Englishness, namely, that, while on the one hand, she challenges the Englishness of her period, particularly from a Unitarian and female perspective, at the same time, as I have already pointed out in my Introduction, she upholds one of its main principles, a middle-class bias. Two ways in which this is evident in relation to imperial trade are in her depictions of tea-drinking rituals and in the relatively unproblematic way that she accepts the cotton industry, points that I will elaborate on in

¹¹⁵ I think here, for example, of the inclusion of rose gardens and glasshouses in this novel. These hosted china roses (initially acquired, as their name suggests, from China, by British botanists in the eighteenth century) and other exotic plants. Linden Groves observes, not without sarcasm, about Tatton Park in Knutsford, Cheshire, on which Cumnor Towers is based, and its Orangery, built in 1818 (during Gaskell’s childhood in Knutsford): “it is a very English experience to be able to stand in the steamy jungle of the conservatory and look through its glass walls to the lawn outside” (64).

¹¹⁶ My use of the term *imperial trade* refers to trade abroad by the British. It overlaps with the British Empire but also includes other places more loosely associated with the empire. I thus include in this term trade with India (as defined in chapter two, a colony of occupation) and trade with China even though the latter was not part of Britain’s empire.

this chapter. In this chapter (as well as in chapter four), I will also argue, however, that Gaskell had a peculiar variation of middle-class Englishness: she demonstrates an optimistic view of gradual (evolutionary) change within English society in which middle-class values and behaviour (and hence Englishness) can be learned and achieved by a wider stratum of the English population. In seeking to ameliorate divisions within her society, to increase the size of the 'in group' of Englishness, she advocates that the way to do this is by adopting middle-class behaviour and habits.

In this chapter I refer mainly to three texts: *Mary Barton*, *Cranford*, and *North and South*. In *Mary Barton* and *North and South*, Gaskell uses the medium of English tea-drinking rituals to depict scenarios that transcend spatial and class boundaries in order to present an inclusive Englishness. Moreover, *Mary Barton* is the only one of Gaskell's stories that refers to opium addiction, which in this novel is associated with un-Englishness. Further, *North and South* is dominated by the cotton industry; it is set in Manchester and focuses a great deal on the challenges of the 'cotton king,' John Thornton. I will argue that, as is evident in *North and South*, Gaskell assumes the rightness of the English cotton industry (at the expense of cotton industries elsewhere in the world and in other parts of Britain). Nevertheless, she also depicts it as a 'new' product (in comparison to, for example, silk and linen) and links it with a developing Englishness in the nineteenth century. Finally, running underneath *Cranford's* comic tone is a finely-tuned account of anxieties within England of tea's origins (China) and the impact of India (with its links with England's cotton industry) on the quiet lives of Cranford's ladies. As in *North and South*, *Cranford* implicitly assumes England's 'right' to trade in these two products, tea and cotton, despite the negative effect of this trading on the Chinese and Indian populations. In *Cranford*, too, Gaskell implies that these

products are part of something ‘new’ in English society, participating in gradual change that heralded ‘new’ aspects to an Englishness that Gaskell welcomes.

Englishness and Trade in Tea

An anonymous article published in 1868 in *All the Year Round*, a weekly journal edited by Dickens, firmly situates tea-drinking within notions of English national identity: “A cup of tea! Blessings on the words, for they convey a sense of English home comfort, of which the proud Gaul, with all his boulevards and battalions, is as ignorant as a turbot is of the use of the piano” (153). This statement recognises that the daily ritual of drinking tea in English homes was at the same time a particular representation of England itself. It contrasts French images of war (boulevards and battalions) with an image of English repose and wellbeing (drinking tea in the home).¹¹⁷ It also assumes that the French have no understanding of this ritual; to grasp its significance one needs to be English. Gaskell’s fiction, too, links tea-drinking with national identity. Moreover, it suggests that participation in tea rituals is a means of mediating class and cultural binaries, thereby introducing an egalitarian version of Englishness. As I argue in this section on tea, however, this ideological work is undermined first by Gaskell’s inability to escape the constraints of her middle-class world view, and also because lurking beneath these texts is a subtext about the English tea trade’s uneasy history.

¹¹⁷ While the term *boulevard* evokes in the twenty-first century an image of a wide, elegant, tree-lined avenue, in the nineteenth century it was generally understood to be a road surface on a military fortification laid out on the tops of the city’s walls and wider than the roads in the city below – its derivation is the Dutch *bolwerk* (translated: bulwark, a fortification).

The history of tea is implied in its etymological links with Chinese dialects. Derived from the (Chinese) Amoy dialect *t'e*,¹¹⁸ the English usage of *tea* can be traced to 1655 when it was still pronounced as *tay* but written as *tee*. Earlier recordings of the word in 1598, however, indicate that *tea* was initially known as *chaa*, which can be traced to the Portuguese *chá*, which in turn traces its origin to the (Chinese) Mandarin *ch'a*.¹¹⁹ Since *tea* was first known as *chaa*, it was probably introduced to England via Portuguese traders, but, by the mid-seventeenth century, most tea came to England via Dutch traders and the British East India Company (by this time it was known as *tea*, not unlike the Dutch form, *thee*). Inherent in the use of the word *tea* in Gaskell's novels, therefore, is its etymological origins in Chinese languages. This raises a question: what other history is concealed in this word, *tea*? Or, to use Freedgood's phrase, what else is "stockpiled" (2) in this seemingly innocuous everyday "home comfort?"

As the above quotation from *All the Year Round* shows, by Gaskell's period tea and Englishness were seen to go hand in hand. Initially a luxury food for England's affluent classes, by the nineteenth century it had crossed class divides and was widely drunk by all strata of society. This dramatic rise in the popularity of tea-drinking in England is demonstrated in Samuel Day's *Tea: Its Mystery and History* (1878), which states that, while the first official record of tea imports dated 1675 recorded an import of 4,713 pounds of tea, these imports grew astronomically: two million pounds per year in 1725, 25 million pounds per year by 1800, and 187 million pounds per year in 1877 (49-55). Day notes enthusiastically that tea drinking is uniquely English: "[I]t is not, possibly, too great an

¹¹⁸ See Chambers Dictionary of Etymology. This dictionary also lists other derivations from Amoy *t'e* including French *thé*, Italian *té*, Spanish *té*, Dutch *thee*, German *tee*, and the Norwegian and Swedish *te* (Chambers, 1988), 1118.

¹¹⁹ Other derivations from Mandarin *ch'a* include Russian *cha*, Persian *chā*, (modern) Greek *tsai*, Arabic *šāy*, and Turkish *cay* (Chambers, 1988), 1118.

assumption to assert that there must exist something about Tea specially suitable to the English constitution and climate; for not even in Scotland and Ireland, nor in any European country, is the beverage consumed to a like extent” (60). David Crole confirms this view in his history of tea, published in 1897, in which he emphasises the wide extent of tea-drinking in England in the 1890s where “80,000,000 cups of tea are daily imbibed” (1). This translates to five and a half pounds of tea per person per year, providing an image of, as Julie E. Fromer aptly comments, “millions of English men and women simultaneously drinking their cups of tea each day” (*Necessary Luxury* 5). Whilst tea was first sold as a beverage in London coffee houses, by the mid-nineteenth-century tea-drinking was firmly embedded in the domestic space. Spanning all classes, tea-drinking had become a regular fixture in daily life in England (De Groot 171).

Tea-drinking was closely aligned with English national identity and English culture, but at the same time was a British activity with tea coming from the British Empire. Tea-drinking took place within the domestic sphere, at the heart of family life, and became a trope for England, which, in its turn, saw itself as the domestic core of its empire. Fromer comments: “The ideal domestic setting evoked by many depictions of the tea table [in, for example, nineteenth-century literature] reflects a particular insular, enclosed, 'English' sense of boundaries between self and other, between inside and outside, private and public, middle class and other, less culturally and economically privileged classes” (*Necessary Luxury* 16). Tea was, however, a product of the *British* Empire; in order to be a tea-drinking English man or woman, one needed to consume the fruits of the British Empire.¹²⁰ The very act of consuming tea products placed English homes in an imperial context (De Groot 190),

¹²⁰ James Walvin traces the economic history of imperial trade in his *Fruits of Empire: Exotic Produce and British Taste, 1660-1800*.

something that, as I will discuss below in relation to *Cranford*, haunted tea-drinking rituals, creating anxieties within England and destabilizing notions of Englishness.

Gaskell distinguishes between Britishness and Englishness in her fiction in relation to tea. For example, the chapter in *Sylvia's Lovers* about Phillip Hepburn's experiences at the Battle of Acre of 1799 between the French and the Turks (the Ottoman Empire) contrasts Englishness and Britishness. In supporting the Turks in this battle, the British were defending their imperial interests by protecting their strategic route to India (Bar-Yosef 155), India being vital for opium production which in turn was sold by the British to the Chinese in exchange for their tea (Fromer, *Necessary Luxury* 322). This battle of Acre was thus firmly linked with British imperial ambitions and its trade in tea. In *Sylvia's Lovers* the Middle East is portrayed as exotic and foreign, in contrast to 'everyday' England. The novel notes the Middle East's lingering "spicy odour" (SL 386) and its harsh and un-English landscape:

Even now in May, the hot sparkle of the everlasting sea, the terribly clear outline of all objects, whether near or distant, the fierce sun right overhead, the dazzling air around, were inexpressibly wearying to the *English* eyes that kept their skilled watch, day and night, on the strongly-fortified coast-town that lay a little to the northward of where the *British* ships were anchored." (SL 386, emphasis mine)

While British ships are, by the nature of their imperial purpose, part of this landscape, the English man (whilst skilful at what he is doing) is not. Indeed, he belongs to England's green and pleasant land which in May is in the height of spring, with the gentle light and fresh greens associated with the season. This un-English scene is thus situated in opposition to, for example, the English scene at Green Heys Fields in *Mary Barton*, described as "a delicious May afternoon" (MB 7). Thus, despite the irony that British participation in this

war was largely about *English* tea consumption, this English man is a stranger in this out-of-the-way, foreign place; his proper place is at home, in England, presumably drinking tea, as do the Bartons and their friends after they leave idyllic Green Heys Fields.

The Working-Class Tea-Party in *Mary Barton*

Tea was constructed in the nineteenth century as peculiarly English. It became a trope for Englishness and, in crossing all strata of society, helped forge a sense of a unified national identity (Fromer, *Necessary Luxury* 11). Gaskell attempts to democratize tea-drinking in her portrayal of a working-class tea-party in the second chapter of *Mary Barton*, although she betrays her middle-class bias by presenting it in a way that will satisfy the cultural expectations of her middle-class audience. Gaskell positions this tea-party in a working-class domestic setting, in Manchester, rather than a middle-class drawing room; the reference to Manchester is significant because of its associations with trade and the working classes. The participants include the working-class Bartons, their friends, the Wilsons, and George Wilson's sister, Alice. Moreover, it is complete with "the delicious glow of the fire, the bright light that revelled in every corner of the room, the savoury smells, the comfortable sounds of a boiling kettle, and the hissing, frizzling ham" (MB 18). Gaskell presents this tea-party for her middle-class readers in order to personalize the working classes, to draw them into the realm of the knowable and to lay the preparatory ground for evoking readers' sympathies for this family as their troubles begin in the chapter immediately following, titled "John Barton's Great Trouble." By evoking images of the tea-table, Gaskell attempts to bridge the divide between the classes; she implies that since the working-classes partake in this English activity they should be included in notions of Englishness.

The tea-table becomes a place for mediating cultural differences, and the tea-party in *Mary Barton* mediates these differences by way of the details and associated rituals of the Bartons' tea-table, albeit to satisfy Gaskell's middle class audience (Fromer, *Necessary Luxury* 117). There is a hint already in the chapter's epigraph, an English nursery rhyme, that the working-classes are part of the wider English tea-drinking community: "Polly, put the kettle on,/ And let's have tea!/ Polly, put the kettle on,/ And we'll *all* have tea" (MB 13, emphasis mine). This rhyme knits together England's tea-drinkers, reminding us of Fromer's image of millions of cups of tea being drunk in England each day (*Necessary Luxury* 5, 121). This inclusivity in an exclusive England, with its firmly established cultural boundaries, is further developed in the description of the Bartons' home, complete with its drawn curtains, which are intended to "shut in the friends" (MB 15). The phrase "shut in" suggests a private space that is womblike, safe and sheltered from their otherwise daily participation in public life that constantly threatens to disrupt this cosy scene (the references to Esther, Mrs. Barton's 'fallen' sister, are evidence of a threatening world *out there*). In this scene, however, even the two unpruned, leafy geraniums on the window sill help to maintain firm borders, forming "a further defence from out-door pryers" (MB 15). Furthermore, whilst this remains a lower-class tea party, as can be seen in its taking place in the kitchen and in the foods being served (ham and eggs, in contrast to the coconut cakes and fresh fruit served by the Hales in *North and South*), as well as in the utensils used (there is no silver tea-urn, for example, a popular inclusion in middle-class tea-parties), this tea-party transcends social boundaries. It shows Mrs. Barton presiding behind the tea-table in a decidedly middle-class fashion. Thus Gaskell propounds a notion of English inclusivity by way of a tea ceremony at the same time that she maintains distinctions between classes by way of the material objects that make up the ceremony. The narrator notes that while Mrs.

Barton may have wanted to superintend the frying of the newly-purchased ham, she “knew manners too well to do anything but sit at the tea-table and make tea” (MB 18). Mrs. Barton maintains the strict middle-class social code of giving precedence to the tea-table, the proper place for the woman of the household at nineteenth-century tea-parties (Fromer, *Necessary Luxury* 89).

This position of the woman behind the tea-table, embodying middle-class English domesticity, serves as an image of England at the centre – the domestic space – of its empire, reinforcing England’s own centrality at the heart of its empire. As Robert says (albeit ironically) after observing Lady Audley at her tea-table in Mary Elizabeth Braddon’s *Lady Audley’s Secret*, the tea-table is the female’s “legitimate empire” (139). In using Mrs. Barton to represent working-class women, Gaskell intimates not only that the working-classes ought to be included in notions of Englishness since they are part of the national ritual of tea-drinking, she also suggests that, because Mrs. Barton follows middle-class protocols behind the tea-table, she is able to represent English national identity as well as any middle-class woman. At the same time, Gaskell is herself a middle-class woman, and, to some degree at least, unable to get outside her own cultural space; she advocates her middle-class view that, for a working-class woman such as Mrs. Barton to be truly English, she must embrace middle-class ideals, including those of the middle-class rituals of the English tea-table.

Shared Cups of Tea in *North and South*

Spatial and class boundaries are negotiated over shared cups of tea in *North and South*, although here, too, Gaskell’s middle-class notions of Englishness are integral to these depictions of shared tea-table experiences. Drinking tea forms the backdrop for various

transitional moments in this novel, beginning with the first reference to tea in chapter one where Margaret Hale recalls her move into adolescence when she first had tea at her Aunt Shaw's. Tea is also present in Mr. Hale's announcement (while his family is taking its tea) of his resignation from the clergy (chapter four), and in the shared tea drinking between the Hales and John Thornton (chapters ten and eleven), and between the Hales and Nicolas Higgins (chapter thirty-seven). Finally, tea also plays a part in Margaret's feeble attempt to avoid meeting John Thornton in London by wanting to take tea in her room rather than having dinner where he is present (chapter fifty-one). These tea-drinking scenes reflect pivotal social changes during the nineteenth century, but also, since these transitional moments reveal elements of anxiety and tension, the fact that these social changes are not unproblematic. I disagree with Deirdre David's dismissal of "the innumerable tea-table debates" in this novel (*Fictions* 17) as an inadequate solution to social divisions, and side, instead, with Fromer's view that these tea-table scenes are "unequalled opportunities [for] establishing important, necessary connections across social boundaries" (*Necessary Luxuries* 335n3). Indeed, in presenting various tea-drinking scenes consisting of working, industrial, and middle class participants, Gaskell uses the image of the tea-table to mediate difference in *North and South*. At the same time, each of Gaskell's examples of tea-drinking in this novel takes place within the upper middle-class domestic setting of the Hales' home. There is no record of shared tea-drinking between, for example, participants from the industrial and working classes. The centre is constructed as genteel and middle-class, typifying England, which suggests that those who come from the other side of the social divide need, in order to become truly English, to become like *us* as Gaskell defines the term; that is, middle-class.

North and South establishes tea-drinking as a middle-class preoccupation by presenting its first tea scene in the context of Margaret Hale's Aunt Shaw's genteel home in Harley Street, London. This tea-party, unlike the Barton's tea-party, does not take place in the kitchen, but in the drawing room, and includes items such as a tea-urn, warmed by a spirit-lamp. This tea-party sets the scene for future tea-parties in this novel, all of which take place in the home of Margaret Hale's parents. Thus, while the Hales may live in straitened circumstances, their familial connections with the Shaws place them within a genteel social context, which sets them up in sharp contrast to their fellow tea-drinkers, the industrialist John Thornton and working-class Nicolas Higgins. Indeed, even though Thornton's dining-room includes a tea urn (a symbol of middle-class tea-drinking respectability) it is not portrayed as on the tea-table in readiness for the next round of tea, to be filled with boiling water from a tea-kettle fetched from the kitchen, as it is in the Shaws' home, but is described as part of the room's ornamentation: "There was not a book about the room, with the exception of Matthew Henry's Bible Commentaries, six volumes of which lay in the centre of the massive side-board, flanked by a tea-urn on one side, and a lamp on the other" (NS 71). This tea-urn is not on the dining-table with a middle-class Mrs. Thornton presiding over it, but forms part of the Thorntons' imitation of a genteel setting. This suggests that the Thorntons are imposters rather than the 'real deal,' aspiring to a gentility that their origins do not warrant.

Chapters nine and ten emphasise social differences between the Thorntons and the Hales through observations, conversations, and actions revolving around Mr. Thornton's visit to the Hales' home for tea. The Thorntons' home is described in specific detail, whereas the few details given of the Hales' home are "subsumed in a general feeling of comfort" (Rosenman 52). While domestic objects were obsessively important to those (like the

Thorntons) manoeuvring for social status, they were scorned by those of genteel backgrounds (Rosenman 53). Promoting this aesthetic of simplicity is another way that Gaskell highlights the Hales' social superiority over the Thorntons. Mrs. Thornton's home, then, is described in great detail. The reader learns, for example, that "the walls were pink and gold [and that] the pattern on the carpet represented bunches of flowers on a light ground" (NS 103). This emphasis on the colour scheme and the pattern in the carpet hints at the Thorntons' preoccupation with 'trivial' materiality in which, by contrast, the Hales did not engage.

One of the transition points in Chapter nine is this: "In Mr. Thornton's house, at this very same time, a similar, yet different, scene was going on" (NS 71). What is similar, yet different? The preceding scene takes place in the Hales' home where Margaret is doing the laundry in order, as Mrs. Hale says, to "prepare properly for the reception of a tradesman [John Thornton]" (NS 70). Margaret replies to her mother that "I am myself a born and bred lady through it all, even though it comes to scouring a floor, or washing dishes" (NS 70). Thus, the Hales are poor, but genteel. The scene following this is described by the narrator as "similar, yet different," and takes place in the Thornton household which, although rich, is that of a factory owner. Mrs. Thornton is not doing housework since, unlike the Hales, she can afford an abundance of servants, but she is sitting in her "handsomely-furnished dining-room . . . handsomely dressed in stout black silk, of which not a thread was worn or discoloured . . . mending a large, long table-cloth of the finest texture " (NS 71).¹²¹ Despite the apparent affluence, however, there are a number of discordant notes in this scene, which illustrate the Thorntons' lack of authenticity. First is the reference to the ornamental

¹²¹ See the comment on Mrs. Thornton's black, silk gown in the section titled "'New' Cotton Versus 'Old' Silk" below.

tea-urn on the side-board, and then comes the sly inclusion of an untrained piano player. Fanny Thornton can be heard from the dining room badly playing a popular French Parlour piece “very rapidly . . . every third note, on an average, being either indistinct, or wholly missed out, and the loud chords at the end being either half of them false, but not the less satisfactory to its performer” (NS 71). While the Thorntons may be able to afford a piano, their lack of social graces means there is no one in the household able to play one.

Mr. Thornton is acutely aware of the social gulf between his family and the Hales. This can be noted in a number of ways. First, to his mother, he says: “The only time I saw Miss Hale, she treated me with a haughty civility which had a strong flavour of contempt in it. She held herself aloof from me as if she had been a queen, and I her humble, unwashed vassal” (NS 72). Attempting to alleviate this divide between himself and the Hales, in this chapter (nine) titled “Dressing for Tea,” Mr. Thornton changes his attire before going to the Hales’ home for tea. Unlike his mother, who “dresses but once a day” (NS 71) and scorns his efforts, he accepts the social proprieties by dressing appropriately for drinking tea in the Hales’ home. He comments to his mother, “Mr. Hale is a gentleman, and his wife and daughter are ladies” (NS 71). Dressing for tea thus symbolises Mr. Thornton’s move into the Hales’ social circle. Mr. Thornton also notes the different effects between the “handsome, ponderous . . . dining-room” (NS 73) of his own home and the charm and warmth of the Hales’ home, and muses that while his own home may be “twenty times as fine . . . [it is] not one quarter as comfortable” (NS 73). Indeed, “it appeared to Mr. Thornton that all these graceful cares were habitual to the [Hale] family” (NS 73). Gaskell heightens this awareness by introducing sexual tension to this scene.¹²² The feminine gracefulness of Margaret

¹²² Scholars such as Piya Chatterjee, Julie E. Fromer, Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace, and Anne McClintock write about the sexualisation of the female body (including hands) in feminized

serving behind the tea-table – “her two round ivory hands [moving] with pretty, noiseless daintiness” (NS 73) – fascinates Thornton, as does the bracelet that is continually falling down over her wrist and the pantomime involving Margaret and her father, in which Mr. Hale holds “her little finger and thumb in his masculine hand, [making] them serve as sugar-tongs” (NS 74). Indeed, Thornton watches her ministrations “with far more attention than he listened to her father” (NS 73). Thornton is mesmerized by this genteel, middle-class world, indicating his deep need for the culturally superior world of middle-class domesticity which he desires to appropriate for himself (Fromer, *Necessary Luxury* 142). In terms of Englishness, what Gaskell is doing here is presenting a character traditionally outside the pale who is fascinated by and who wants to become part of common notions of Englishness reflected in middle-class domesticity and symbolized in the daily ritual of drinking tea.

Gaskell uses the Hales’ shared cup of tea with Nicolas Higgins, a factory worker, to reinforce her (utopian) vision of a unified England. The immediate context of this event is Higgins’ daughter Bessie’s death. She dies after a long illness from the effects of breathing in cotton fluff in the factories, and has, in Higgins’ words, “led the life of a dog” (NS 203). Additionally, Higgins has spent the day in other heart-breaking situations tending to various working-class folk experiencing the effects of the longstanding strike against the factory owners. Not surprisingly, Higgins concludes that he is “sore hearted” (NS 204), but rather than having a “sup o’drink just to steady me again[st] sorrow” (NS 203), Margaret convinces him to go home with her instead, which results in an extra-ordinary tea-party in the Hales’ home. The unusualness of this tea-party is already suggested in that, while John Thornton is an invited guest (in chapter ten), Higgins misunderstands Margaret and assumes her

tea-table rituals in the nineteenth century.

invitation is to “take a dish o’ tea” (NS 204) with Mr. Hale himself, one which neither Margaret nor her father can, in good conscience, refuse. However, while Mr. Hale anticipates an awkward encounter with this “drunken infidel weaver” (NS 206), this tea-party turns out quite differently. Mr. Hale’s use of the term *infidel* suggests that, in Mr. Hale’s middle-class view, Higgins falls outside national notions of Englishness, which is to be both Christian and Protestant and therefore, by implication, has no place in national tea-table rituals. At the end of this extraordinary tea-party, however, which includes “earnest conversation – each speaking with gentle politeness to the other” (NS 208), the narrative concludes with an unusual scene: “Margaret the Churchwoman, her father the Dissenter, Higgins the Infidel, knelt down together [in family prayer]. It did them no harm” (NS 215). Tea-drinking mediates these cultural and class differences and this leads to the unity of shared prayer. This demonstrates Gaskell’s view that Englishness should include people of many creeds who essentially share a common culture and shared morality and that the national rituals of the tea-table are the means to mediate this. Moreover, an opposition is set up between tea and ale. Indeed, the spiritual dimension of this tea-party at the Hales’ home (prayer) conveys that the cure for Higgins’ broken heart is not to be found in unspiritual alcoholic stupor (associated with drunk, pagan infidels) but in the (presumably Christian and also English) activity of drinking tea. Tea-drinking rituals, then, imply spiritual revival in the face of working-class hardships.

Sharing a cup of tea mediates cultural and class differences in *North and South*. John Thornton in particular is portrayed sympathetically as a believable character, someone with whom middle-class readers would identify. As in *Mary Barton*, Gaskell attempts to present a knowable class, be it the working class in *Mary Barton*, or the industrial class in *North and South*. In giving a personal face to these two classes, Gaskell widens definitions of common

notions of Englishness. Moreover, the mediating power between these two classes (working and industrial) and the middle and upper classes is a cup of tea.

Opium in Exchange for Tea

Ironically, the tea that is so crucial in social relations within the English domestic space in Gaskell's novels is only available because of English trade overseas. The tea is bought from China and paid for with opium grown in India, which in turn is paid for with English cotton piece goods made in wretched conditions by the English working classes.¹²³ Thus, importing tea is interrelated to the production and exporting of cotton products. Moreover, it is imperial trade that enables participants in the local cotton trade (such as the Bartons, John Thornton, and Nicolas Higgins) to become part of the insular domestic setting that was middle-class Englishness in the mid-nineteenth century.

While this irony may have eluded Gaskell's audience, her fiction does register tea's exotic origins in China, most notably, as is discussed below, in *Cranford*. While, on the one hand, tea-drinking rituals helped foster the image of a united domestic, private space in the centre (England), at the same time tea is also portrayed in Gaskell's fiction as exotic, brought from the orient. Despite Britain's efforts, China remained an impenetrable foreign other, a situation that exacerbated English anxieties about the price, availability and purity of Chinese tea. Indeed, calling to mind Pierre Macherey's "play of history beyond [the text's]

¹²³ Today, opium is commonly associated with China, and tea with India. In Gaskell's period, however, tea was originally bought from China, and it was only, as relations with China became increasingly fraught, that Britain turned its attention to growing its own tea on the Indian subcontinent. Indeed, initially, Indian-produced opium was exchanged for Chinese tea. As is also discussed in this chapter, it is ironical that, in time, the British associated opium with Chinese vice. Scholars who examine the links between tea, cotton, and opium include Liam Corley ("The Imperial Addiction of *Mary Barton*"), Jack Beeching (*The Chinese Opium Wars*), and Brian Inglis (*The Opium War*).

edges" (94), the seemingly innocent English pastime of drinking tea had an uneasy history, and this "history" lurks also in Gaskell's texts. Gaskell wrote during the second of the Anglo-Chinese wars known as the Opium Wars (1856-1860), which were in part about the British East India Company's 'right' to trade in Indian opium in exchange for Chinese tea. While Britain gained the upper hand in these wars, thereby securing more control over its tea imports, English apprehension about Chinese tea continued. Additionally, there was growing public agitation against the large-scale production of opium in India by the British East India Company since opium was considered morally questionable, a subversive power leading to the supposedly un-English habit of opium addiction (Poon 116-117).

The interconnection between the imperial trading activities of cotton, opium, and tea can be illustrated by looking briefly at *Mary Barton*, set in 1839-1842 in trade-depressed Manchester, a period coinciding with the loss of the China trade during the first Opium War, which occurred in the same time setting as the novel (1839-1842). The Opium War formed a complex set of conditions such as the sudden decrease in the availability of tea from China, which led to a dwindling in the trade of opium and English cotton piece-goods in India, and thus resulted in a downturn in Manchester's cotton trade, all of which serves as a backdrop to the suffering factory workers in *Mary Barton*. Liam Corley writes of the "interdependence of the cotton and opium trade" (7), and argues that in *Mary Barton* opium addiction is a trope for empire, the empire's downward trajectory in its addiction to imperial expansion being mirrored in John Barton's opium-addicted personal demise (12). Corley thus sees Gaskell's novel as a critique of British imperialism. While I disagree with Corley's argument for opium as a trope for empire – rather, I read opium as a metaphor for un-Englishness – his argument concerning the interdependence between opium and cotton, and thus also between these and tea, is important. These three products were indeed linked in English

imperial expansion in the mid-nineteenth century, and a downturn in the trade of any one of these had a corollary effect on the corresponding two strands. For foreign trade to operate optimally, these strands needed to be working together.

Mary Barton is the only narrative by Gaskell that speaks explicitly about opium. Indeed, opium contributes in large part to John Barton's decline from a compassionate, law-abiding tea-drinking working-class Englishman, to a violent, opium-addicted murderer. Tea is associated with good times in this novel, whereas opium is connected with vice and evil. This contrast between good and evil (in John Barton's life) can be seen in the novel's structure, which begins with good times, friendship, and tea, and contrasts these to the remainder of John Barton's experiences, featuring famine, friendlessness, and opium. Gaskell's narrator initially portrays Barton positively, stating in the first chapter that "the good predominated over the bad in [Barton's] countenance" (MB 7). Moreover, this first chapter demonstrates a domestic side to Barton and Wilson, who leave their wives resting "on the blue cotton handkerchiefs of their husbands" (MB 8) while the men take a walk, each carrying one of the Wilson twins. This idyllic scene carries over into the second chapter about the tea-party. Indeed, these chapters are closely linked in that the Bartons and the Wilsons "*adjourn* from Green Heys Field to tea, at the Bartons' house" (MB 13, emphasis mine). These events take place in times of relative prosperity, as can be seen in the Bartons' home, "crammed with furniture (sure sign of the good times among the mills)" (MB 15), on which rest items such as a "bright green japanned tea-tray" (MB 15) and a "crimson tea-caddy" (MB 15). These good times also translate into feasting on Cumberland ham and eggs with fresh bread amidst the "merry clatter of [tea] cups and saucers" (MB 15), the sum total

of these details of this tea-party making this a “delicious May afternoon” which stands in stark contrast with the downward trajectory of John Barton’s life.¹²⁴

There is no hint, then, of opium in these opening two chapters of *Mary Barton*. By the sixth chapter, however, much has changed the circumstances in John Barton's life: his wife, the centre of his home who serves tea in the proper middle-class way at their tea-party, and the “good influence over [his] life” (MB23), has died in childbirth. Further, hungry and struggling to make ends meet, due to lowered wages and shortened working days, Barton is increasingly consumed with morose thoughts about the suffering of the labouring classes, particularly after the fire at Carson's mill. The subject of opium is introduced in the sixth chapter in this context of increasing gloom. However, in the first instance it is not Barton who takes it. Rather, mothers “bought opium to still the hungry little ones” (MB 58). By chapter ten, however, after the failure of the Chartist delegation to London, of which Barton is part, Barton is, in his own words, “not the man I was” (MB 118). This part of the novel, which introduces Barton's opium addiction, is in stark contrast to the cosy scene of the tea-party in chapter two with the cheery blue-and-white check curtains drawn to “shut in the friends met to enjoy themselves . . . [as a] defence from out-door pryers” (MB 15). No longer is there warmth and light in Barton’s life, symbolised in the merry tea-party scene; rather his life is now bleak, dark, and sinister, evidenced in the details given of his (now) uncurtained home and witness of his increasing opium addiction:

Still, [Barton] often was angry. But that was almost better than being silent.

Then he sat near the fire-place (from habit) smoking, or chewing opium. Oh, how

¹²⁴ Space prevents inclusion of this in my thesis, but there is scope for further study on the links between the ‘every day’ items at this tea party (including *Cumberland* sausages, a *Japanese* tea tray, and, presumably, *Chinese* crockery) in light of the scholarship done by Brown (2003), Freedman (2006), and Hall and Rose (2006).

Mary loathed that smell! And in the dusk, just before it merged into the short summer night, she had learned to look with dread towards the window, which now her father would have kept uncurtained; for there were not seldom seen sights which haunted her in her dreams. Strange faces of pale men, with dark glaring eyes, peered into the inner darkness, and seemed desirous to ascertain if her father was at home. Or, a hand and arm (the body hidden) was put within the door, and beckoned him away. He always went. (MB 118).

Tea is thus associated in *Mary Barton* with friends meeting inside a well-lit room with drawn curtains which block out the cold and the outer darkness, while opium is part of a friendless scene, the darkness without fusing with the darkness within.

Implicated in John Barton's demise is the industrial system itself, of which Barton is not the only victim. The Indian population, too, from whom the opium is acquired in order to obtain the socially accepted commodity of tea, is also immolated. Because the British East India Company flooded the Indian market with English piece goods (made in Manchester factories by workers such as Barton) in order to pay for Indian opium, the Indian textile industry was subsequently destroyed, resulting in wide-scale hunger also among the Indian textile workers.¹²⁵ The social and moral price paid for the English sense of home comfort in a daily cup of tea is not far away. Freedman points out how the Bartons' calico curtains unravel Gaskell's ideological work of English (middle-class) domesticity,¹²⁶

¹²⁵ This manipulation of the Indian textile markets will be explored further in the section below on Textiles.

¹²⁶ For a comprehensive reading of the significance of the calico curtains in the Bartons' home, see Freedgood's "Coziness and its Vicissitudes: Checked Curtains and Global Cotton Markets in *Mary Barton*" (chapter 2 of *The Ideas in Things*), in which Freedgood argues that while the calico curtains are intended to delineate between domestic and foreign (inside and outside, public and private), their links with the slave trade and cotton plantations in America, the suffering of England's working classes, and the demise of South Asian cotton

and the lack of curtains in this latter, sinister scene is an appropriate indicator of the implications of England's cotton trade that haunt this text.

Gaskell sidesteps this, however, by implying that John Barton displays the recklessness characteristic of the working classes.¹²⁷ Barton spends the family's grocery money on opium, for example, so that Mary, too, experiences "clemming" (MB 141).¹²⁸ While Gaskell uses her narrator to explain that Barton's opium addiction helped him to "forget life, and its burdens" (MB 169), she nevertheless builds these images of John Barton's opium taking into her tracing of the downward trajectory of his life, leading up to the murder of Harry Carson. The narrator comments that Barton's "diseased thoughts" can be "ascribed to the use of opium" (MB 169), although she excuses him at least to some extent because he is uneducated and therefore presumably morally ignorant. These comments on Barton's opium addiction form part of a key passage in *Mary Barton* which uses the metaphor of Frankenstein's monster to illustrate middle-class unease about the working classes: "The actions of the uneducated seem to be typified in those of Frankenstein, that monster of many human qualities, ungifted with a soul, a knowledge of the difference between good and evil. The people rise up to life; they irritate us, they terrify us" (MB 170).¹²⁹ In this metaphor, the working classes in general and opium addicted John Barton in particular are depicted as evil monsters. No longer is John Barton portrayed as

markets contribute to the inherent dismantling within the text of Gaskell's ideological work of presenting the 'civilized' domesticity implied in the working class Barton home.

¹²⁷ In *The Moral and Physical Condition of the Working Classes* (1832), Gaskell's contemporary James Phillips Kay outlines the reasons for working class 'recklessness': '[it] can often be traced in a neglect of that self-respect, and of the love of domestic enjoyments, which are indicated by personal slovenliness, and discomfort of the habitation' (qtd. in Freedman, 61).

¹²⁸ Another word for *clemming* is starving.

¹²⁹ Gaskell makes the common error in this passage of referring to the monster as Frankenstein. In the original novel by Mary Shelley, Frankenstein is the human being who creates the monster.

fitting in with middle-class English national rituals by way of a cup of tea. Instead, he is constructed as 'other' (foreign, un-English), a monster who ingests drugs from India. Appealing to her middle-class readers through the narrative use of the inclusive pronoun "us," Gaskell invites her audience to watch with horror the deterioration of this inhuman, working-class monster. After the murder, there are no more references to opium. John Barton's degeneration is complete.

Opium symbolizes the extent of John Barton's decay as a person, as he develops into his socially unacceptable persona: "a Chartist, a Communist, all that is commonly called wild and visionary" (MB 170). Barton changes dramatically in the period between the idyllic scene at Green Heys Fields and the cosy tea-party, at the novel's beginning, and the murder of Harry Carson. Gaskell depicts opium as the un-English habit that is central to the horror of this demise, and whereas tea is a trope for Englishness, opium is a symbol for un-Englishness in this novel. John Barton's behaviour, seen in his enslavement to opium, suggests that this working-class man, at least, has not evolved into the middle-class, socially acceptable Englishness that Gaskell promotes. The novel suggests that this is, in part, due to his no longer having the benefit of his wife's moderating presence, as well as the randomness of his drawing the lot to murder Harry Carson; but it is also noteworthy that the novel does not provide a way out for John Barton. This certainly shows the bleak reality of working-class existence at the mercy of the trade cycle, but John Barton's characterisation also highlights the stark contrast between the working and middle classes, in which the former are connoted as un-English unless they conform to middle-class conventions. Moreover, as I discussed in chapter one, Gaskell depicts an optimistic view of a progressive Englishness through generational change. In *Mary Barton*, therefore, it is not John Barton who in the end acquires middle-class Englishness but rather, as I noted in

chapter two, it is his daughter, Mary, in her migration to Canada, a land depicted as gentle and verdant, described as “a country more like our own [England]” (qtd. in Archibald 37), who becomes ‘English’ in this ‘new’ setting.

Although opium had clear English connections, being cultivated by the British East India Company (in India) and sold to the Chinese, the English public thought of opium as foreign, associated with Chinese opium dens. China was part of the darkness 'out there' and separate to England's domestic space within. Portraying opium as ‘other’ reveals Gaskell’s agenda concerning an exclusive England, complete with drawn curtains to shut out the darkness; to be English, one needed to be within the spatial boundaries of England. Marty Roth writes about the English distinction between tea and opium:

Tea and opium were an imperial binary, a trade-off. Both are drugs but one was 'civilized' and 'mild,' the other barbaric and strong. Both were identified with their consumers rather than their producers, so that opium that was British-produced and illicitly sold to China soon became the demonic Chinese product par excellence, and tea, which was Chinese and sold to the English, very soon came to constitute Britishness itself (92).

These ironies bypassed middle-class thinking (and, possibly, Gaskell’s, too) in the nineteenth century, which firmly constructed opium as uncomfortably Chinese, and tea as comfortingly English. Opium, then, was the cultural foil for tea being considered safe, domestic, and English. At the same time, the close association of tea with opium (and the Orient) generated anxieties about the tea trade and its English consumption. Gaskell’s firm alignment in *Mary Barton* with those who opposed opium is consistent with her registration of anxieties about tea in her later novel, *Cranford*.

Anxieties about Tea in *Cranford*

Published in 1853, and situated between the two Opium Wars, *Cranford* refers to tea as a commodity that is firmly associated with a foreign other. Opening with the statement that “Cranford is in possession of the Amazons; all the holders of houses, above a certain rent, are women” (CD 5), the first chapter quickly establishes that although these “gentlefolks . . . might be poor, . . . [[they] were all aristocratic” (CD 7), in whose homes the drinking of tea was a fixed “household . . . ceremon[y]” (CD 7). Indeed, not unlike the opening chapter of *North and South*, which includes a tea-party that takes place within the domestic space of an aristocratic home, the first chapter of *Cranford* also includes details about a tea-party:

When Mrs Forrester . . . gave a [tea] party in her baby-house of a dwelling, and the little maiden disturbed the ladies on the sofa by a request that she might get the tea-tray out from underneath, everyone took this novel proceeding as the most natural thing in the world; and talked on about household forms and ceremonies, as if we all believed that our hostess had a regular servants' hall, second table, with housekeeper and steward; instead of the one charity-school maiden, whose short ruddy arms could never have been strong enough to carry the tray upstairs, if she had not been assisted in private by her mistress, who now sat in state, pretending not to know what cakes were sent up; though she knew, and we knew, and she knew that we knew, and we knew that she knew that we knew, she had been busy all the morning making tea-bread and sponge-cakes. (CD 7)

Unlike Gaskell's account of the tea-party at Margaret Hale's Aunt Shaw, however, this tea-party at Mrs. Forrester's home focuses much less on the middle-class accoutrements of tea-

drinking.¹³⁰ Indeed, not only is *Cranford* reticent about tea rituals, but the reference to Mrs. Forrester's tea-party is immediately followed by the narrator's discussion of the Cranford ladies' use of the phrase, "elegant economy" (CD 8), in which money-spending is considered to be "vulgar and ostentatious" (CD 8). The narrator records that, "We none of us spoke of money, because that subject savoured of commerce and trade" (CD 7). One senses in *Cranford* that making a show of tea-table practices, as in Aunt Shaw's home, for example, would have been considered in Cranford society to be vulgar and ostentatious. Tea-drinking in a context of genteel "elegant economy" is thus a trope in *Cranford* for an English way of life that is opposed to the concept of trade. Moreover, on a global scale, that Cranford's society (in the heart of England), ostensibly at least, ignored the realities of poverty and work, mirrors a national preoccupation that disguised the economic exploitation of empire with the flimsy cover of imperial spoils.

This opposition between trade and gentility corresponds with one of the novel's themes, the crumbling of the divide between the public, masculine world of trade and the private, middle-class, feminine aversion to it. Indeed, this story reveals the direct intrusion of the public onto the private, of the empire on to the centre. Thus, already in the first chapter, the introduction of Captain Brown to Cranford strikes a discordant note because, "in addition to his masculine gender, and his connexion with the obnoxious railroad, he was so brazen as to talk of being poor" (CD 8). An irony of this opposition is that the public sphere – trade and the empire – has already entered Cranford in its everyday use of tea, a

¹³⁰ There are only brief references to drinking tea in *Cranford*, such as Mrs. Forrester's invitation to Miss Matty for tea at 5 o'clock (CD 115), this being the usual time for tea in fashionable homes as a means of staving off hunger until a more formal dinner was served later in the evening, and a brief comment about Miss Mattie's tea-urn (CD 156).

product originating from imperial trade. In one sense, then, the empire has already entered the centre, if unrecognised and by the back door.

This opposition is further destabilized as the novel develops, in Miss Mattie's trading in tea. Although Cranford's ladies never speak about money, when this safe setting is threatened by Miss Mattie's imminent financial ruin, they discuss tea at greater length in the context of trade. Mary Smith (the narrator) proposes that Miss Mattie open a tea-shop as an "agent of the East India Tea Company" (CD 156), in order to pay for her board and lodging. The advantages seem obvious to Mary:

Tea was neither greasy nor sticky [and] . . . No shop window would be required.

A small, genteel notification of her being licensed to sell tea would, it is true, be necessary, but I hoped that it could be placed where no one would see it.

Neither was tea a heavy article . . . The only thing against my plan was the buying and selling involved. (CD 156-57)¹³¹

Selling tea in the heart of English gentility (Cranford) exposes and also complicates the tidy separation in Cranford between tea-drinking, as a trope for an English way of life, and the concept of trade. Indeed, the license mentioned above reveals much: trade is happening and, indeed, is "necessary", but it is hoped that no one "sees" it. It is, therefore, no surprise that it requires a businessman's daughter, Mary Smith, to point out that opening this tea shop means that the "buying and selling" (that is, trade) of tea makes it possible to maintain the genteel social ritual of drinking tea. Thus, with the support of Mr. Smith, Mary's father, "a capital man of business . . . [who] grasped at [the idea of selling tea] with all the energy of a tradesman" (CD 165-66), Miss Mattie subsequently opens a tea-shop in her dining-

¹³¹ In addition to a tea-tax, the British government also required sellers of tea to obtain a license.

parlour. Opening this tea-shop forces the threatening world of commerce and trade into the closed, domestic society of Cranford. At the same time, this weakening of the opposition between domestic and foreign is itself destabilized because tea is the commodity that is most firmly aligned with the empire's domestic space (England). Tea (from China) is sold by a female character (Miss Mattie) to women from within a domestic setting (the dining-parlour).

The domestic space is able to accommodate tea to the extent that, on the surface at least, its stability appears to be unchanged, despite its exotic trading origins. This impression is undermined, however, by the fact that this trade is generated by male characters who operate outside the domestic space: Mr Smith who approves of and arranges the scheme; the masculine bureaucrats who supply the trading licence; and, ultimately, the East India Company, directed by men, who supply the tea in the first place. Moreover, the narrator's reference to the tea being stored in boxes with "cabalistic inscriptions all over them" (CD 169) is another (albeit playful) reference to tea's exotic origins. These inscriptions are probably Chinese letters, foreign to the English eye, and a reminder, together with the tea varieties referred to (Congou, Souchong, Gunpowder, and Pekoe) that these teas are from a foreign source, China. A gentle irony in this scene is evident through the ladies' suspicious response to anything foreign, and yet, at the same time, their purchase of tea – by then transferred from the 'foreign' boxes into innocuous "bright green canisters" (169) – at the local shop without seeming to consider the origins of their purchase.

These references to tea's foreign origins allude to English anxieties about the purity of Chinese teas. England lacked control over the tea blends that originated in China, and

China was consequently widely thought of as mysterious, threatening, and foreign.¹³² Despite the imperial gains made after the Opium Wars, the Chinese still had control over the blending of their teas, and the English were suspicious of the adulteration of these blends. Indeed, an article published in 1868 in *All the Year Round* opined that “Tea in its finest state never reaches, never can reach, England” (156). According to Samuel Day, green teas from China were artificially coloured by a deadly poisonous substance (46-7), something that Gaskell also seems to be aware of in her characterisation of Miss Matty, who “plaintively entreated some of her customers not to buy green tea – running it down as a slow poison, sure to destroy the nerves, and produce all manner of evil” (CD 171).¹³³

The British solution to this domestic uncertainty caused by the China tea trade was to develop an alternative source of tea, albeit this time within its imperial compass, in British-controlled areas of India, most notably Assam and Ceylon. Charles Bruce, who is popularly credited with discovering the first tea plant in India for the East India Company, recognised the potential of this discovery for development in ongoing definitions of English national identity. He wrote in 1839, the year that the first shipment of Indian tea was auctioned in the English tea market:

In looking forward to the unbounded benefit the discovery of this plant will produce to England . . . I cannot but thank God for so great a blessing to our country . . . Should what I have written on this new and interesting subject . . . help a little to impel the tea forward to enrich our own dominions, and pull down the haughty pride of China, I shall feel myself richly repaid. (160-61)

¹³² For more detail on the history of English anxieties about the adulteration of tea, see Erika Rappaport, “Packaging China: Foreign Articles and Dangerous Tastes in the Mid-Victorian Tea Party” (2006).

¹³³ Sheridan Le Fanu, another Victorian author, also picks up on this theme in his short story, “Green Tea,” published in his collection of short stories, *In a Glass Darkly* (1872).

Over the course of the nineteenth century tea imports from India increased, so that by the 1880s they exceeded those imported from China. Indeed, a shift in marketing strategies during this time emphasised the improved purity of those teas produced within imperial boundaries under the British flag, in which notions of empire building were implied whenever English men and women consumed tea from the (Indian) dominions (Rappaport 137). Drinking tea from the empire was a patriotic thing to do, helping to confirm British imperial power, with England its controlling centre.

Tea from Indian sources thus came to the rescue of a national conundrum where the trope for national identity (tea) was imported from an unpredictable and foreign source, and paid for by an un-English product (opium). India also comes to Miss Mattie's rescue in *Cranford* in the form of her brother, Peter Jenkyns, who is assumed to have died in India. While he starts off with a "career . . . rather pleasantly mapped out" for him (CD 62), Peter, through a series of events, which includes a practical joke that goes seriously awry, runs away from home whilst a teenager, ending up in India. He is never heard of again until the narrator hears of an Aga Jenkyns in Calcutta. After sending him a letter she discovers he is the long-lost Peter, and he subsequently moves back to Cranford. Furthermore, "a day or two after his arrival, the [tea] shop was closed" (CD 179), and the left-over tea given as presents to Miss Mattie's friends, with the rest distributed amongst the elderly who remember Peter from his youth. Peter's return from India allows Miss Mattie to return, once more, to living "very genteelly [in] Cranford" (CD 179). The public sphere, in this case the empire, has, at least to some extent, determined the stability of the private, domestic sphere of England, symbolised by Cranford's genteel society.

The ladies of Cranford's hoped-for return of tea to its previously fugitive status as a mere social ritual embodying Englishness is in fact disappointed by Peter's arrival, however,

for he continues to be the disrupting force in Cranford begun in the first chapter by Captain Brown. Despite the title of the final chapter – “Peace to Cranford” – which implies that the old, feminine, domestic Cranford society has somehow been restored, the genteel society of Amazonian women is in fact forever altered. Peter, who is a masculine, imperial trader, and, to some extent, directly contrasts the “elegant economy” of Mrs. Forrester's tea-party introduced at the novel's beginning, is a constant reminder of this change. Indeed, the nature of Peter's arrival signifies changes within English society. Unlike the empire's entrance through the backdoor, noted above in relation to English trade in tea, this imperial trader (Peter) enters boldly through the front door of Miss Mattie's tea shop. This is imperialism dressed up as homecoming. The narrator notes that the ladies of Cranford's “quiet lives were astonishingly stirred up by the arrival from India” (CD 180), an arrival they label as “so very Oriental” (CD 180), complete with his far-fetched tales of the exotic, thought by Miss Pole to be “as good as an Arabian night” (CD 180). Thus, despite the narrator's comment in the novel's final paragraph of a return to “the old friendly sociability in Cranford society” (CD 187) that Peter helps maintain, the very fact of his being there alludes to something having been irrevocably changed in the domestic, female world of Cranford. No longer is the empire present in a subtle, unspoken way, by way of the tea served at an English tea-table. Instead, there is a heightened cognizance in Cranford about the empire and its associations with trade. With Peter now gracing Cranford's social life, trade is no longer taboo, perhaps best illustrated in his manoeuvrings to reconcile the outraged, genteel Mrs. Jamieson with Lady Glenmire, who has committed the social faux pas of marrying the ‘common’ Mr. Hoggins.

Through Peter, trade and the empire are no longer an unmentionable presence in Cranford, and its safe domestic space is forever altered. In this novel (as in *Mary Barton* and

North and South), Gaskell uses tea as a trope to promote the view that Englishness should include a democratic blend of the brew that makes up England. Arbitrating difference, albeit following middle-class protocols, tea mediates cultural and class boundaries, conveying a sense of “English home comfort” (Fromer, *Necessary Luxury* 134). Careful readings of Gaskell’s texts also reveal, however, the complexities inherent in this view of Englishness. Tea’s uneasy history as a commodity debunks the view that a cup of tea conveys unproblematically this sense of a domestic and soothing English pastime. Rather, the backdrop to tea-drinking in Gaskell’s texts contains multiple uncomfortable layers of cultural anxieties about this seemingly innocuous English ritual’s links with the darker hues concealed within English imperial expansion. I explore these ideas in the following section in the context of Britain’s expansion and trade in textiles and the implications of this for Englishness in Gaskell’s fiction.

English (and Indian) Textiles

Peter Jenkyns does not return to England with a supply of Indian tea, but does return with an Indian muslin gown (CD 177). In the mid-nineteenth century muslin was a finely-woven, luxurious cotton fabric. Indeed, Peter has made his money in India as an indigo planter, indigo dye being one of the main dyes available at that time for cotton fabric. These details indicate that Peter has formed a close tie not only with the cotton industry in India, but also (indirectly) with the cotton industry in England, indigo dye being a valued product there. The setting of *Cranford* is the mid-1830s, but Peter has been absent from Cranford since around 1810. After he leaves home, he joins the Royal Navy to fight the French in the Napoleonic Wars (CD 70), after which he is “ordered off to India” (CD 71). Part of Peter’s time there is spent in the Royal Navy defending British interests on the Indian subcontinent.

He is present at the First Anglo-Burmese War (1823-1826), a war triggered by the Burmese invasion of British-controlled Assam in north-eastern India, where the tea-plant had been discovered in 1823, and which became a major tea-producing area for the British. Peter is at the siege of Rangoon in 1824 (CD 178).

Peter's gifts from the East are representative of the textile industry, first in the gift of a "large, soft, white India shawl" (CD 71) sent to his mother while he is still living in India, and later, on his return to England, the muslin gown for Miss Mattie.¹³⁴ Shawls were a "marker of respectable English womanhood" (Daly 238), and were part of social reproduction in the passing on of these valued textiles from mother to daughter. This latter point is alluded to in *Cranford* by the Rector, Mr. Jenkyns, who notes of Peter's shawl for his mother that "It is just such a shawl as she wished for when she was married, and her mother did not give it to her" (CD 71). Not only were shawls the mark of English womanhood and respectability, but also, in most novels of the mid-nineteenth century, the initial purchaser of the shawl is almost always a male member of an English family, the shawl frequently given as a gift by a male traveller who is re-entering the domestic space (Daly 238, 249). This gift of a Kashmir shawl was how English male travellers to the 'East' traditionally restored themselves to "England and to Englishness" (Daly 248). While Peter does not physically re-enter England when he sends this gift to his mother, it is his first communication to his family after his hasty departure not only from his family but from England itself, and this gift of a Kashmir shawl allows him to metaphorically re-enter his family's (and England's) domestic space. Moreover, this revelation, twenty-five years later,

¹³⁴ A Kashmir shawl such as the one given by Peter to his mother was more common and less expensive than the rarer patterned shawls which took much longer to make (Daly 248).

by a now elderly Miss Mattie, shortly before Peter's physical return to England, prepares the reader and serves as a precursor to his literal re-entering of the English domestic space.

This connection of a Kashmiri Indian shawl with English domestic respectability and the restoration of a male figure to English domesticity and to Englishness itself has another dimension: the demise of the Kashmir shawl – indeed, the whole of the Indian textile industry – in consequence of the rising fortunes of the English textile industry. By the nineteenth century, technological innovation in machine-made shawls in Britain, including the mass production of cheap (Indian) imitations, meant reduced demand for imported products from the Indian subcontinent, thus threatening the textile industry in Kashmir to the point that, by 1870, following these and other European developments, the Kashmir shawl trade was effectively ruined (Maskiell 28). Furthermore, British imperial policy limited the buying power of major markets in India, the Ottoman Empire, and Iran, for Kashmir shawls. Moreover, between 1780 and 1820 British power enabled a restructuring and realignment of trade on the Indian subcontinent, favouring the export of Indian agricultural products (such as opium and raw cotton), rather than manufactured goods and, on the other hand, the importation on a major scale of British-produced textile products into India. D.A. Farnie notes that in the 1820s India became “a net importer of cotton goods instead of a net exporter” (*English Cotton* 99). This shift is marked in *Cranford* in that Peter's attempt to restore himself to Englishness, through the giving of a Kashmir shawl upon his return, fails. Like Kashmir shawls, Indian muslin is also no longer in vogue in England. Miss Mattie comments about Peter's gift: “I'm afraid I'm too old” (CD 177). This comment can be understood on multiple levels. It suggests that a muslin gown is better suited to someone younger than Miss Mattie. This comment also suggests, however, that Miss Mattie has moved on, as has England and notions of Englishness. By the mid 1830s, in which *Cranford* is

set, Englishness included a firm hold on the marketing of *English*-made textile products in which the empire was subservient to the needs of the centre. Perera observes: “England is the center of the text, as of the cosmos, with the outer limits, necessary and present, incorporated in their proper places” (40). Since there was a desperate need for export markets for the vast quantity of mass produced piece-goods made in English cotton factories, it was India’s “proper place” to import these piece-goods at the expense of its own cotton textile industries. Thus, not only had Kashmir shawls lost their significance, but there was also no place in England for any other Indian cotton, as indicated in Miss Mattie’s response to Peter’s gift.

Englishness, empire, and cotton were frequently linked in the nineteenth century, as can be seen in comments such as Thomas Carlyle’s, that “society is founded upon cloth” (*Sartor Resartus* 30), and Sydney Smith’s in 1842, that cotton is the “great object of the Anglo-Saxon race” (qtd. in Farnie, *Cambridge* 721). Indeed, E. Leigh commented in 1871 on British superiority, that “[n]o manufacture of any kind, of any age or country, has developed so much original talent and true genius, so much power of invention, mechanical skills, and enormous wealth, as the cotton manufacture of Lancashire” (qtd. in Farnie, *Cambridge* 721). Similarly, Schumpeter writes that “English industrial history can, in the epoch 1787-1842 . . . be almost resolved into the history of a single industry [cotton]” (270-71). These links between cotton, Englishness, and empire, then, were uncontested by the English population in the nineteenth century, but were thought to be a natural outcome for a racially superior nation that was obviously in the commercial (fourth) stage of civilization; it was England’s ‘natural’ destiny.

Gaskell, of course, lived in the centre of the cotton industry, Manchester, Lancashire, for all of her married life (1830-1865). P. Gaskell, a distant relative, wrote of

Manchester as “the metropolis of the manufacturing world” (229). Indeed, Manchester’s nickname in the nineteenth century was “Cottonopolis” and, in 1864, *The Times* referred to the region of Manchester as “Cottonia” (qtd. in Farnie, *Cambridge* 722). Fabric stores in Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa still use the term *manchester* to refer to household textile products.¹³⁵ Moreover, Gaskell was known as “the Manchester novelist” (Uglow 85) and set a number of her stories in Manchester, including *Mary Barton* and *North and South*.

While Gaskell, especially as a woman and a Unitarian, does challenge the Englishness of her period, she does not, in the main, critique the concept of Manchester's cotton industry and its associated Englishness, as did Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, for example.¹³⁶ Rather than advocating dissolution of the system itself, Gaskell's representation of Manchester's cotton industry in these two novels, *Mary Barton* and *North and South*, aims to highlight the poor social conditions experienced by the factory workers, exacerbated by the rapid growth of the factory system. In her Preface to *Mary Barton*, for example, Gaskell states her intention to “give some utterance to the agony which, from time to time, convulses this dumb people; the agony of suffering without the sympathy of the happy . . .” (MB 3). This reference to this suffering occurring only from “time to time” is telling, in that, even though this novel presents a raw side to Manchester's working-class lives, something that had not been done to the same degree in fiction before, Gaskell’s objective for her middle-class audience is not to critique the cotton industry itself, but to point out the instability of working-class conditions, especially in periods of economic downturn in the cotton industry, such as occurred in the 1840s in Manchester. Indeed,

¹³⁵ See the Oxford English Dictionary.

¹³⁶ Engels wrote “The Condition of the Working-Class in England” (1845) while he lived in Manchester. Marx frequently visited Engels in Manchester in the latter 1840s. The conditions of the English working-classes contributed to their collaborated work, “The Communist Manifesto” (1848).

there are clues in *North and South* that Gaskell was aware that Manchester's factory workers were generally substantially better off than their agricultural counterparts. She notes, for example, the Hales' difficulties in obtaining a house-servant because, since the factories paid better wages, there were fewer women available for paid household service (NS 128). Furthermore, in a discussion with Nicolas Higgins, a factory worker, Margaret Hale discourages Higgins' move to work as a farm-hand in the south where social conditions are far worse than in the factory towns. Gaskell relates:

'You must not go to the South,' said Margaret, 'for all that. You could not stand it. You would have to be out in all weathers. It would kill you with rheumatism. The mere bodily work at your time of life would break you down. The fare is far different to what you have been accustomed to.'

'I've nought particular about my meat,' said [Higgins], as if offended.

'But you've reckoned on having butcher's meat once a day, if you're in work . . .'

(NS 279)

In 1845, each family in Lancashire ate 450 pounds of butcher's (that is, red) meat per year, in addition to bacon, pork, poultry, and fish (Easson, *Elizabeth Gaskell* 49). Gaskell's purpose was thus not a criticism of "Cottonia" itself, since the cotton industry had proven to be profitable for factory-owners and factory-workers alike. Rather, her aim was to encourage reform of social conditions so that the deprivations of the "hungry forties" (when she wrote *Mary Barton*) would not recur from "time to time." Setting aside her sympathetic portrayal of working-class poverty, Gaskell played a part in social constructions of her period that assumed the superiority of the English cotton industry centred in Manchester, and participated in the foregrounding of this industry not only in her fiction but also personally. It was with a degree of pride, for example, that she wrote to a pending visitor to

Manchester in 1864: “I also enclose some of my cards. If you have time they will enable you to see the things best worth in Manchester; viz 'Murray's FINE spinning-mills' . . . You would there see the whole process of preparing & spinning cotton, with the *latest* improvements in the machinery” (*Letters* 729). In Gaskell's view, visiting a cotton mill would be a highlight in a visit to Manchester.

Thus, Gaskell, in keeping with her milieu, identified Englishness, at least in part, with the cotton industry. John Thornton's comment in *North and South*, could, therefore, be Gaskell's when he refers to the Manchester (English) cotton industry as having a “wide commercial character . . . [making it] into the great pioneer of civilisation” (NS 113). Cotton had a unique function and currency in nineteenth-century Englishness that no other textile had. Indeed, as I discuss below, cotton expanded at the expense of and at the same time that the demand for other textile industries, both in the empire and within England, decreased.¹³⁷ Before exploring this point, however, I need to comment on a contrast made in *North and South* between the 'new' textile (cotton) and an 'old' textile (silk) since it adds another dimension to Gaskell's notions of Englishness.

¹³⁷ This leads to a question about my argument in chapter two about Gaskell's ambivalence about the concept of empire. Did she, at least in the area of trade in cotton, contribute to the imperial project, as Litvak argues? In the main, Gaskell's fiction only implicitly assumes imperial trade in cotton piece goods and does not focus on it. Rather, it dwells on the cotton industry's (social) impact at *home*, especially in Manchester, the city in which she lived. As I stated in chapter two, as a Unitarian, Gaskell's main concern was social change in *England*, and in this respect, the empire was of secondary importance. Moreover, *Mary Barton* and *North and South* were both published prior to the Indian Mutiny in 1857, which, as I argued in chapter two, was a turning point for Gaskell's depictions of empire, at which time she became more insular in her outlook. Nevertheless, her uncritical acceptance of the cotton industry and its exportation of cotton piece goods to the empire mean that, at least to some extent, she did support the imperial project, albeit motivated by her love for *England* which needed overseas markets in order to progress.

'New' Cotton versus 'Old' Silk

When the Hales are invited to the Thorntons' annual dinner party, Margaret has a discussion with her mother about what she will wear to the party. In contrast to her genteel mother's treatment of Margaret's attire as "serious business" (NS 135), Margaret refers to her silk dresses as "the embarrassment of riches" (NS 135). Margaret's view also differs from that of (working-class) Bessy Higgins, who, on being told about Margaret's invitation to dine "wi a' th' first folk in Milton" (NS 135), anxiously enquires about Margaret's dress for the occasion, and is relieved to hear that Margaret does, indeed, own a silk gown to wear for the occasion. Mrs. Hale and Bessy are thus linked by Gaskell in their valuing of silk as the textile that best represents those who mix in affluent circles. Similarly, Mrs. Thornton is only ever seen in this novel in a "handsome black silk, as was her wont" (NS 103). The late-nineteenth-century writer Eleanor H. Porter refers in her novel *Across the Years* to the black silk gowns owned by Miss Priscilla and Miss Amelia as "a sort of outward symbol of inward respectability – an unfailing indicator of their proud position as members of one of the old families" (126). Mrs. Thornton seems to indicate the same with her black silks. She may not be from an 'old' family, but she is nevertheless proud of the status her family has acquired. Wearing black silk every day reinforces her elevated position in Milton's society. The irony is that she can only afford these silk items, which presumably come from France or China, because of the success of her son's English cotton factories.¹³⁸

Margaret stands in contrast to the upper-class Mrs. Hale, the working-class Bessy Higgins, and the nouveau-riche Mrs. Thornton, who all value silk for its social meaning in an outmoded sense of Englishness. Instead, Margaret stands for something 'new' in society, an

¹³⁸ While England did have a silk industry in the nineteenth century, English silks tended to be of inferior quality, and thus only used for items such as handkerchiefs and cheap linings, with the silks of high fashion mainly coming from France (Rothstein 796-97).

added dimension to 'old' notions of Englishness. Margaret's attitude towards silk is part of a larger discussion concerning the north/south dichotomy of this novel. Margaret comes to her conclusion about her silk dresses whilst living in Milton (Manchester), England's (cotton) textile capital of the North. Moreover, these silk dresses are given to her by her aunt Shaw in England's capital, London, situated in the south. Silk, then, represents an 'old' (upper-class) way of life to Margaret, associated with genteel southerners, a way of life (and thinking) which she gradually sheds in this novel, culminating in her alliance with the 'cotton king,' John Thornton. Margaret is wearing a silk gown when she first meets Thornton, which highlights their cultural differences, although, even at this early point in the novel, this silk gown is "without any trimming or flounce" (NS 58), indicating an austerity in Margaret and hinting at the gradual trimming of her upper-class views as the novel unfolds.¹³⁹ Margaret's comment to her mother about her silk dresses reflects her personal development, and, since the other women do not share this view, it indicates that she is developing at a faster rate than the other female characters, be they upper, middle, or lower class. Margaret represents something 'new' in this novel that, at least in part, transcends class. As discussed in my first chapter, these changes in Margaret's upper-class views mean that she develops a more inclusive outlook, which values all people, including the working classes and the new industrial classes. Indeed, Gaskell uses her characterisation of Margaret to demonstrate her own progressive view of history, advocating a more inclusive view of English society. Furthermore, in linking Margaret with John Thornton, the novel's representative of the 'new' textile (cotton) and who comments on cotton's "wide commercial character . . . [making it] into the great pioneer of civilisation" (NS 113), Gaskell introduces the notion that this 'new' industry has an imperial role to play in civilizing the world, something which 'old'

¹³⁹ This change in Margaret is discussed more fully in chapter one.

textiles such as silk cannot do. Moreover, because the cotton industry is located largely in England's north, the novel implies that this imperialism is not to be centred in the south, in London, but that all of England is involved in this imperial project. Indeed, David Black's observation (and hope) was firmly in place by the mid-nineteenth century, that "neither virtue or beauty consists either in a silk gown, or in foreign linen," but that women "wearing the product of their own country" (English cotton) would improve the balance of trade (qtd. in Kuchta 130).¹⁴⁰ Not unlike drinking a cup of tea from the English dominions (India), wearing English cotton was a patriotic thing to do. The cotton industry was thus a catalyst for expanding (English) civilization, and, by implication, Englishness in the mid-nineteenth century.

English Cotton Products and the Indian Cotton Industry

Firmly linked in nineteenth-century minds was the assumed superiority of the English race and its logical outcome, a transformed and powerful cotton industry, the cornerstone of [British] commerce, which, in order to succeed, needed to outperform other cotton industries, including those in India. Edward Baines concludes *The History of the Cotton Manufacture* (1857) by lauding the effect of the English cotton industry:

No nation ever had a more universal commerce than this: no manufacturers ever clothed so many of the human family, as the cotton manufacturers of England . . . Philanthropy could not desire a more powerful agent for diffusing light and liberty through the world. It will be a proud distinction for the manufacturers of England, if their trade should minister to the moral improvement of the human species. (531-32)

¹⁴⁰ David Black wrote "Essay upon Industry and Trade" in 1706.

Clearly, “moral improvement” justified economic exploitation, at least for Baines and his contemporaries, and, while Gaskell serves as a mouthpiece for Manchester’s “suffering” workers (Preface, *Mary Barton* 3), she is silent about those exploited outside England’s borders. Indeed, while she make no reference to the Indian cotton industry *per se*, in *Cranford* she does contrast the ‘East,’ depicted as unchanging and static, with progressive, innovative England. India is introduced in the third chapter when a cousin of Miss Mattie’s, Major Jenkyns, returns to England after twenty years of service in the British Army in India, and comes with his wife to visit Miss Mattie for a number of days. Although the Jenkyns are English, the novel portrays their long association with the ‘East’ as a source of contamination. The narrator records them as “quiet, unpretending people . . . languid, as all East Indians are” (CD 36). Belonging to the English ‘diaspora,’ this couple would no doubt have considered themselves to be English whilst living in India. Yet *Cranford*’s English narrator, the well-bred Mary Smith, deems them un-English, lacking English vitality; they are “East Indian” and “languid.” Their un-Englishness is reinforced in their having a “Hindoo body-servant” (CD 36); Miss Mattie’s English servant “never ended her staring at the East Indian’s white turban, and brown complexion” (CD 37). Indeed, even the fair-minded Miss Mattie is unable to contain her English distaste for this foreigner: she shrinks from him when he waits on dinner. Her English distrust of his black skin and foreign appearance is also evident when she links him in her mind with Blue Beard, the legendary murderer of a string of wives. Thus, Major Jenkyns’ associations with India and with his black servant place him outside Englishness as it is perceived by those who live within England.

This opposition between England and India is developed in *Cranford* in the story that Mrs. Brown tells of her flight from “cruel India” (CD 129). She leaves home and husband in India after the death of six children, all in infancy, in the hope of saving the life of her latest

baby, Phoebe, and she relates the story of her harrowing journey to Calcutta through “lonely . . . thick forests . . . [and] deep woods, which . . . looked very strange and dark” (CD 130). She is helped on this journey by kind natives, but, when her baby falls ill, it is a “kind Englishman” (Peter Jenkyns) who saves her (CD 131). Mrs. Brown’s story implies that, while the native population can help to a point, in a crisis it is English skills and ingenuity that are critical. Of further significance in this story is the English woman’s destination: home, that place “where our baby will live” (CD 130). This home turns out to be near the Avon in Warwickshire, the heart of England with its rich associations with Englishness. Thus, the dark, strange woods of India, which the woman encounters in her travels, are in distinct contrast with an English rural landscape, their differences as stark as life and death.

Thus, although Gaskell’s writing does not state explicitly that English cotton products are superior to those from India, she does contrast these two countries by implying English superiority. Gaskell also develops this contrast in her elevation of English weavers in *Mary Barton*. Theories of labour in the nineteenth century included an opposition between the oriental artisan, who, it was believed, produced a hand-crafted, exotic, static item in the mysterious and unchanging 'East,' and English technological and industrial innovation, generally thought to be the natural outcome of the racially superior productive European mind (Maskiell 53).¹⁴¹ Moreover, in the context of racial theories foregrounding notions of differing intellectual capacities between races, it was assumed that the dark-skinned peoples of the Indian subcontinent were intellectually inferior to white-skinned Europeans,

¹⁴¹ The irony in this supposed distinction was that a good deal of European 'innovation' during this period was an imitation of Kashmiri (and Indian) designs and weaving, and, conversely, any innovation displayed by the Kashmiri weavers was interpreted by the Europeans as degenerative (Maskiell 54).

and, in support of this, Gaskell depicts the English weavers as literate and intelligent. She writes in glowing terms of the weavers in Manchester:

In the neighbourhood of Oldham there are weavers, common hand-loom weavers, who throw the shuttle with unceasing sound, though Newton's 'Principia' lies open on the loom, to be snatched at in work hours, but revelled over in meal times, or at night. Mathematical problems are received with interest, and studied with absorbing attention by many a broad-spoken, common-looking factory-hand. It is perhaps less astonishing that the more popularly interesting branches of natural history have their warm and devoted followers among this class. There are botanists among them, equally familiar with either the Linnaean or the Natural system . . . There are entomologists . . . shrewd, hard-working men, who pore over every new specimen with scientific delight. (MB 38-39)

In a context of wide-spread illiteracy, long and exhausting working hours, and the expense associated with obtaining these resources, it is doubtful whether Gaskell is reflecting reality in this description. She presents the working classes in this way, however, not only to valorise them to her middle-class audience, which included Manchester's factory owners, but, in doing so, participates in wider cultural perceptions of racist ideology.¹⁴² On a sliding scale, even hand-loom weavers were commonly thought to be situated higher than dark-skinned peoples, and therefore more capable of producing superior-quality cotton textiles.

¹⁴² Notwithstanding these comments about Gaskell's stretching of the truth, many within the working classes did value learning, and attended, for example, William Gaskell's poetry lectures (Uglow 100). For more on this topic see Terry Wyke's "The Culture of Self-Improvement: Real People in Mary Barton" (1999).

Gaskell was thus part of the milieu that linked Englishness and the cotton industry to the detriment of the Indian textile industry. As noted above, imperial policy gradually squeezed out the latter markets, so that English textiles (particularly cotton piece-goods) could flood the entire subcontinent markets. Thus, while India had been one of the world's major exporters of cotton, by the 1790s England had become the dominant exporter to world markets (Farnie, *English Cotton* 81), and by the 1820s Indian imports of cotton piece-goods from England exceeded their exports of these products (Farnie, *English Cotton* 99).¹⁴³

Cotton versus other British Textiles

Gaskell also contributed to this foregrounding of England's cotton industry by depicting other textiles as belonging to a former age, and not part of the 'new' Englishness in which the cotton industry played its part. Increased production of cotton products in England resulted in the dwindling of both the cotton industry elsewhere in Britain, as well as associated textile industries, especially linen and lace-making, most of which were located in Britain's (Celtic) peripheries. Farnie writes about the increase of the cotton industry in England at the expense of the Celtic fringe's cotton industry:

The increasing concentration of the cotton industry within Lancashire took place at the expense of the industry of Celtic lands of the country mills upon the immediate borders of the shire. The cotton industry of Ireland declined after 1825 . . . and that of North Wales in the 1860s. In Scotland the increasing concentration of resources upon thread manufacture was reflected in the

¹⁴³ Of course, imperial policy was not the only factor aiding this shift; other factors such as security in the supply of raw cotton (mainly from America) and the growth of English power generally also contributed to these market changes.

successive decline of the number of its employees after 1861. (*English Cotton* 73)

Thus, even in Scotland the cotton industry was small and under-resourced in comparison to the English cotton centres.

Until the 1820s, flax (made into linen) was the world's most important fibre, but by that time it was overtaken by cotton (Farnie, *Cambridge* 721). Linen was largely produced as a cottage industry in the (Celtic) 'linen triangle' which included areas around Glasgow, in Scotland, and northern Ireland (Solar 811). In the nineteenth century, linen was still associated with the peasantry and family smallholdings, linen spinning and weaving having proved difficult to mechanise, and subsequently demand for linen went down. While Gaskell refers to many household articles and items of clothing as made of linen, these seem, in the main, to have been made in previous eras.¹⁴⁴ Mrs. Hale makes a telling comment in this regard in *North and South*. Seemingly unable to comprehend (and later to adjust to) the family's change in circumstances, Mrs. Hale, displaying her upper-class background, says to Margaret, "who on earth wears cotton that can afford linen?" (NS 44). Gaskell situates Mrs. Hale in the past as valuing textiles that are no longer in vogue, portraying her as outside a progressive Englishness that embraces the technological advances made in the textile industry and its consequent foregrounding of cotton.

Lace is another textile portrayed as belonging to the past. The advent of machine-made lace in the nineteenth century relegated traditional lace-making into the realm of folk art (Kriegel 67). Thus, various references to coarse, home-made lace for Lady Ludlow in *My*

¹⁴⁴ References to linen in Gaskell's fiction include: the laundry hanging in working-class Manchester, including various articles of linen (MB 14); Lady Ludlow's house-linen (MLL 2); the elderly servant, Sally's, snow-white apron and cap, both made from linen, in *Ruth* (RU 114), and the memory of the white linen used for dressing Molly Gibson's dead mother in preparation for her burial (WD 151).

Lady Ludlow implies that she is trailing behind in her notions of Englishness – she is not keeping up with England’s commercial progress. Lace did, however, have a unique currency, often associated with family lines, although, as pointed out in chapter one, this, too, is reflective of old-fashioned views of Englishness.¹⁴⁵ Owning a piece of “ancient lace,” no matter how old and how darned, meant that its owner could boast an English pedigree (old blood). Margaret Dawson’s mother, for example, in *My Lady Ludlow*, owns a piece of “real old English point” lace (MLL 1), providing much-needed social currency. Margaret Dawson writes:

My father was a poor clergyman with a large family. My mother was always said to have good blood in her veins; and when she wanted to maintain her position with people she was thrown among, – principally rich democratic manufacturers, all for liberty and the French Revolution, – she would put on a pair of ruffles trimmed with real old English point, very much darned to be sure, – but which could not be bought new for love or money, as the art of making it was lost years before. These ruffles showed, as she said, that her ancestors had been Somebodies, when the grandfathers of the rich folk, who now looked down on her, had been Nobodies, – if, indeed, they had any grandfathers at all. (MLL 1)

Mrs. Dawson is not only a “Somebody” but is portrayed as more English in her “real old English point” (MLL 1, emphasis mine). The rich democratic manufacturers she is “thrown among,” (MLL 1), on the other hand, are depicted as un-English, in love with French views (“liberty and the French Revolution”). Moreover, Mrs. Dawson disdains their lack of

¹⁴⁵ An example referred to in chapter one is Squire Hamley’s old-fashioned views of blood lines in *Wives and Daughters*.

pedigree: are they, perhaps, “Nobodies” with untraceable ancestries, riddled with illegitimacy?

The links between wearing old English point lace and an old-fashioned sense of Englishness also feature in other stories by Gaskell. The wearing of a piece of ancient lace in *North and South* redeems Mrs. Thornton in the eyes of Mrs. Hale, who, not unlike Mrs. Dawson in *My Lady Ludlow*, has fallen on hard times. While the genteel Mrs. Hale is initially reluctant to engage with the common Mrs. Thornton, Gaskell records a change of attitude:

Mrs. Hale was making rather more exertion in her answers, captivated by some real old lace which Mrs. Thornton wore; “lace,” as she afterwards observed to Dixon, “of that old English point which has not been made for this seventy years, and which cannot be bought. It must have been an heir-loom, and shows that she had ancestors.” So the owner of the ancestral lace became worthy of something more than the languid exertion to be agreeable to a visitor, by which Mrs. Hale's efforts at conversation would have been otherwise bounded. (NS 89)

Mrs. Thornton's attempt to be a “Somebody” (with ancestors) by wearing old English point lace succeeds with Mrs. Hale, who also values this old-fashioned notion of Englishness. Similarly, *Cranford* includes the amusing anecdote of some “fine old lace” belonging to Mrs. Forrester, “the sole relic of better days . . . [which] cannot be got now for love or money” (CD 94). This lace is soaked in milk (to clean it) and is subsequently swallowed by her cat. Being the irreplaceably precious and significant item that it is, the lace is retrieved from the cat by Mrs. Forrester, with the help of tartar emetic. Moreover, *Wives and Daughters* refers to elderly Miss Phoebe Browning's old lace and to “the kindly old maids [who] aired their old lace” for the charity ball (WD 281).

Thus, in Gaskell's writing, lace is associated with the past, and, in contrast to the cotton industry, never as a developing and important English textile industry. In this context of textiles and the cotton industry, then, despite its illustrious connections to 'old blood,' lace, too, like silk, did not have the golden links with progress, technology, and industry that cotton did and which were so closely linked to Englishness in the mid-nineteenth century. At best, ancient lace was part of historical notions of Englishness and of past glories that had faded with time and were no longer relevant – other than to elderly women – in mid-nineteenth-century England.

With the advent of the Industrial Revolution and the subsequent rise of the cotton industry, the linen and traditional lace-making industries declined. One other textile that needs further comment in relation to Gaskell and Englishness, in the context of empire, is the wool industry. Like the cotton industry, England's wool industry, largely situated in Yorkshire, depended on the empire, most notably by way of importing raw wool, particularly from the Australian colonies (Jenkins 765), and, with increasing production capacities due to the development of new technologies, formed an essential part in the expansion of the British economy in the nineteenth century. The Saltaire Mills in Shipley, Yorkshire, was the largest wool textile mill in the world when it opened in 1853 (Jenkins 775). Gaskell's familiarity with aspects of the wool industry in Yorkshire can be seen in her references to it in *The Life of Charlotte Bronte* (1857).¹⁴⁶ Wool was thus part of English innovation and industry in a context of progressive notions of Englishness and Gaskell was no doubt aware of this. She does not seem concerned about where the raw materials come from (the empire) but simply takes them for granted as rightfully belonging to the centre.

¹⁴⁶ See, for example, her description of the history of woollen manufacture in chapter two.

After all, in Gaskell's conceptualization of Englishness, it is England and English progress that matters most.

Thus, despite Gaskell's apparent and developing aversion to the empire "out there," at the same time evident in her writing is the inevitable interconnection between England's domestic setting and its empire in the nineteenth century. Indeed, she presents an ambivalent nexus of tea, opium, and cotton, all linked with imperial trade which profoundly affected England's domestic life. As my analysis has shown, Gaskell's Englishness challenged some aspects of nineteenth-century Englishness, by, for example, extending the parameters of tea-drinking to include even an 'infidel' such as Nicolas Higgins, but went along with prevailing views in others. Moreover, while her writing challenges notions of a 'pure' Anglo-Saxon national identity, she did uphold some tenets of racial ideology of her period, by at times depicting dark-skinned Indians at times as inferior to white-skinned English men and women. Gaskell's concern was largely for the 'other' at home in England, not the 'other' "out there" in the empire. Indeed, even in her sympathetic portrayal of the 'other' at home, she implies that their inclusion in her version of Englishness will necessitate their acculturation into middle-class ways, as seen, for example, in the discussion of tea-table practices in this chapter. I will continue this discussion in the following chapter by investigating how Gaskell's constructions of masculinity and her optimistic depictions of Muscular Christianity and her involvement in the Christian Socialist Movement, again underpinned by her Unitarian convictions, helped facilitate her peculiar version of Englishness in which she envisages a slowly evolving English social system in which both upper and lower class men meld into a middle-class form of Englishness.

Chapter Four

Cultural Capital: Manliness and Masculinity

As I have already argued in this thesis, Gaskell's Unitarian beliefs inform her construction of Englishness, which is, frequently, undogmatic and progressive, embracing changes coming out of the Industrial Revolution. Gaskell's Englishness also assumes an inherent goodness in humankind, and is thus optimistic about social change within England. It is conscious of social injustices against the 'other' within English society, and seeks to include those ordinarily excluded from notions of Englishness. Gaskell's identity as both Unitarian and female also underpins her Englishness as it contributed to the imagining of masculinity and Englishness in the nineteenth century. In Gaskell's context, the English male body was frequently seen as a trope for English, male control, both at home and abroad in the empire, although, as Donald E. Hall also points out, this trope was an ideological construct which should be seen as part of wider hegemonic struggles of the mid-nineteenth century (10). Gaskell played a role in fashioning prevailing constructions of middle-class masculinity and of Englishness through her writing, but we will also see that, as a Unitarian and as a woman with proto-feminist sympathies, her contributions in this respect had a particular bias towards an inclusive Englishness in which she interrogates the narrow boundaries of the Englishness of her period that prevented the admittance of women and also many men into its 'in group.' As we will see in this chapter, Gaskell's writing endorses an Englishness that includes women and also men who did not 'fit' regular definitions of masculinity in the nineteenth century.

In Gaskell's depictions of English masculinity, she optimistically foregrounds a slowly evolving English social system in which those in the 'out group' of nineteenth-century Englishness assimilate the behaviours of the 'in group,' the middle classes. I begin my discussion of this by focusing on her proto-feminist sympathies and will briefly consider one of her essays, "Company Manners," which exemplifies Gaskell's frustrations with the separation of gender spheres in Victorian England which effectively excluded women from Englishness. I will then concentrate on changing and widening definitions of gentlemanliness in the nineteenth century, and how Gaskell uses these to employ her own notions of Englishness as she applies principles from the 'Muscular Christianity' and the Christian Socialist movements, social developments that resonated with her Unitarian faith. In this analysis I concentrate on the following texts: *North and South*, which includes a discussion between John Thornton and Margaret Hale about the qualities of a gentleman, and *Wives and Daughters*, with its focus on social change, and with one of its main characters, Roger Hamley, of 'old' blood but educated at Rugby. I will also discuss two short stories published in the *Christian Socialist* magazine and in the period of Gaskell's involvement with this movement, "Christmas Storms and Sunshine" and "The Sexton's Hero." Each of these stories exemplifies Gaskell's perspective of widening the parameters of the 'in group' of Englishness by assimilating more men into a form of middle-class Englishness. I conclude this chapter with a discussion of *Ruth*, and suggest that, also in this novel, Gaskell argues for a more inclusive Englishness by implying that the 'true' Englishman in this novel is the hunchbacked dissenting minister, Thurstan Benson.

Maleness, Masculinity, Manhood

However, before embarking further on this discussion of masculinity and Englishness in Gaskell's writing, I need to define a number of basic terms used in this chapter. I employ Herbert Sussman's definitions of maleness, masculinity, and manhood in their distinctions between biology (maleness) and socially constructed gender (masculinity or manliness, since the terms are interchangeable), and with their emphasis in the Victorian period on control and self-discipline. Sussman distinguishes between the terms *male* (or *maleness*), which in the Victorian period was "thought of as innate in men" (12-13), and the terms *masculinity* and *manliness*, which he defines to be "multifarious social constructions of the male current within the [Victorian] society" (13).¹⁴⁷ He argues that this distinction is "especially important for the Victorians for whom the hegemonic bourgeois view defined *manliness* as the control and discipline of an essential *maleness* fantasized as a potent yet dangerous energy" (13). Sussman goes on to argue that he defines *manhood* as "the achievement of manliness, a state of being that is not innate, but the result of arduous public or private ritual and, for the Victorian bourgeois, of continued demanding self-discipline" (13). Sussman's emphases on evolving definitions of masculinity and the possibility of achieving manliness in the nineteenth century are helpful in a discussion of Englishness since they help explain the fluidity of definitions of Englishness in this period, and also Gaskell's vision of movement between classes in which men from both upper and lower classes move towards the concept of masculinity as defined by the middle classes.

¹⁴⁷ Walton, in her recently published book on models of manliness in the novels of Charlotte Yonge, chooses to use *manliness* in preference to *masculinity* because "masculinity is the twenty-first century's preferred word" (6) whereas *manliness* reflects the preferred terminology of the Victorian period. However, like Sussman, I use both terms interchangeably.

I also use John Tosh and Susan Walton's important contributions to scholarship on masculinity in the nineteenth century to structure my analysis of how Gaskell's portrayal of masculinity affects her notions of Englishness. Tosh argues that masculinity's focus in the Victorian period, which was largely about control and authority (*Man's Place* 89), found expression in its emphasis on moral attributes such as courage, and a work ethos that emphasised taking on responsibilities in both the public and private sphere (*Manliness* 83-102). Drawing on Tosh's scholarship, Walton states that "manliness for the Victorians contained desirable moral characteristics that all men should aim to acquire: courage, determination, readiness to work at useful tasks and to take familial and political responsibilities" (6). In this chapter, I argue that these characteristics of masculine courage and determination, a readiness to work, and the assumption of responsibility are intertwined with notions of Englishness in Gaskell's fiction, where she foregrounds the possibility of being admitted into the 'in group' of Englishness if these characteristics are practised by those (such as the working classes) who are normally considered to be outside of Englishness. Tosh writes:

Boys became men not only by jumping through a succession of hoops, but by cultivating the essential manly attributes – in a word *manliness*. Energy, will, straightforwardness and courage were the key requirements. Sometimes there was an implied claim to natural endowment; more often a manly bearing was taken to be the outcome of self-improvement and self-discipline. This aspect was explicit in what was for the Victorians the key attribute of manliness – independence. The term . . . suggested autonomy and opinion. (*Man's Place* 111)

Improving the self was thus paramount to achieving manliness in this period. It was the way that the eighteenth century *feminized* gentleman could refashion himself as *masculine* in the

nineteenth century (Cohen 315). Indeed, adopting the codes associated with masculinity and gentlemanliness (interchangeable terms in the nineteenth century) served as a 'bridge' to middle-class notions of Englishness (Colls, *Identity* 77). Walton, too, notes that the values of "courage, determination, readiness to work at useful tasks and to take familial and political responsibilities" crossed class lines by being worthy qualities for which all men should strive (6). Manliness could thus be learned and was, at least in theory, accessible to men of all classes.

Gaskell's Proto-feminism

Gaskell constructs masculinity from a proto-feminist perspective. Valerie Sanders includes Gaskell's writing in her observation of the "steady decline in classically heroic male characters" in English novels in the nineteenth century, where few heroes end up with their pride and ego intact (96).¹⁴⁸ Indeed, Gaskell's leaning towards feminism, and, as I discuss below, her relatively independent life as a Unitarian, influenced her inclusive vision in her depictions of Englishness in which she alludes to the exclusion of women from normative understandings of English identity. Gaskell's personal involvement with nineteenth-century feminist activity included friendships with both older and younger participants in the growing women's movement, including the fiercely independent and single-minded Florence Nightingale and the Winkworth sisters, Emily¹⁴⁹, Susannah, and Catherine, intellectual women whose education included tuition in Greek and Latin from William Gaskell (Easson,

¹⁴⁸ Sanders argues that anti-heroes in Gaskell's fiction include: Mr. Benson and Mr. Bellingham in *Ruth*, Philip Hepburn in *Sylvia's Lovers*, Harry Carson in *Mary Barton*, and Osborne Hamley in *Wives and Daughters*.

¹⁴⁹ Emily Winkworth's married name was Emily Shaen.

Elizabeth Gaskell 20).¹⁵⁰ Elizabeth Gaskell sympathised with the plight of women of her period (Nestor 36), as seen, for example, in her support for and signing of Barbara Leigh Smith's petition on married women's property rights in 1856, as well as her approval of campaigns for female education and employment (Uglow 311).¹⁵¹ Susannah Winkworth commented to Gaskell that men "have so many paths to turn to [whereas a woman] often has difficulty finding *one* on which she can work without doing more harm than good" (qtd. in Uglow 163), and notes to a friend that "[Gaskell] and her friends seem to have just such notions about these matters as we have" (qtd. in Uglow 163).

Gaskell's sympathy for feminism may be attributed, at least in part, to her Unitarianism, a faith that placed great emphasis on individual freedom and equality in marriage (Uglow 78). Gaskell never played a typically submissive role in her marriage, signing her name, for example, as Elizabeth Gaskell rather than Mrs. William Gaskell. Further, Unitarian tradition differed from mainstream thinking in that the husband was not considered to be responsible for his wife's actions. William Gaskell, therefore, did not question the right of his wife to hold her own opinions even if they differed from his own, and defended the publication of an 'offensive' novel such as *Ruth*, despite it being burned by various male members of his congregation (Perkin 266). Gaskell commented to Tottie Fox in a letter that "I don't believe that William would ever have *commanded* me" (*Letters* 109). Moreover, Gaskell also had personal autonomy over much of the income earned from her writing. Wishing to extend her European holiday in 1858, for example, she quickly wrote two

¹⁵⁰ Other friends included older feminists such as Fanny Wedgewood, Harriet Martineau, Anna Jameson, and Mary Howitt, who called for change as early as the 1830s. She also became a mentor and friend of many of the next generation of feminists who formed the Langham Place Group, including Tottie Fox, Bessie Parkes, Barbara Leigh Smith, Adelaide Procter, Anna Mary Hewitt, and Miranda and Octavia Hall.

¹⁵¹ See Robin B. Colby's *"Some Appointed Work to Do": Women and Vocation in the Fiction of Elizabeth Gaskell* (1995) for more on this topic of women and vocational independence.

stories for Dickens' *Household Words*, "& asked for immediate payment, in order to obtain money to gratify this wish" (*Letters* 534).¹⁵² Her final independent business transaction just prior to her death was the purchase of a house in 1865, a present for William. Gaskell was also unusually independent, in having remarkable freedom for a mid-nineteenth-century middle-class wife and mother of four young, dependent daughters, being frequently away from home (and family) either on holiday or holed up somewhere, writing. The conclusion to *North and South*, for example, was written at Lea Hurst, the Nightingale family's country estate.

In her essay titled "Company Manners" (1854), Gaskell suggests that the parameters of Englishness should broaden beyond normative definitions of masculinity and include women, too. The backdrop to "Company Manners" is twofold. First, it is Gaskell's response to Victor Cousin's *Madame de Sablé. Etudes sur les femmes illustres et la société du dix-septième siècle*, written in 1854 about Madame de Sablé¹⁵³ and other "celebrated French women of the 17th century" (CM 295), and promptly read by Gaskell in that same year (Jumeau 16). No doubt Gaskell noted the freedom of these intellectual women to speak with men at the French *salons* about literature, science, and philosophy. A further contributing factor to "Company Manners" was Gaskell's formative friendship with Mary Clarke Mohl, an English woman living in Paris, whom Gaskell had already met in England.¹⁵⁴ Gaskell and

¹⁵² "Right at Last" (initially published as "The Sin of a Father" in Volume 18, 27 November 1858); and "The Manchester Marriage" (initially published as "A House to Let" in *Household Words* Extra Christmas Number, 1858).

¹⁵³ Madame de Sablé was a seventeenth century French writer whose literary salons influenced writers such as François de La Rochefoucauld.

¹⁵⁴ Despite her French connections, Mohl was, as noted by Gaskell in a letter to Tottie Fox, "English in spite of her name" (*Letters* 326). Mohl and Gaskell "belonged to overlapping worlds" (Lesser 37), sharing various friends, including Florence Nightingale, Eliza Fletcher, and Fletcher's daughter, Margaret Davy, Sir James Stephen, and Grace Schwab (Lesser 37, Uglow 347-349, Yarrow 17).

Mohl's friendship became more intense during Gaskell's first visit to Paris in 1853. Mohl was in many ways an extension of the formative influence on Gaskell of Eliza Fletcher's *salon* gatherings in the radical ferment of Edinburgh in the 1820s. Not unlike Fletcher's *salons*, Mohl's *salons*, "with [their] brilliant conversations, scholarship, openness and oddity," were irresistible to Gaskell (Uglow 349).¹⁵⁵ Mohl's voice can be heard in "Company Manners" as well as two other pieces written in this same period, "My French Master" (1853) and "Modern Greek Songs" (1854) (Uglow 349). The "English friend of mine [who is] English by birth, but married to a German professor" in "My French Master" (69) is most likely based on Mohl (Mitchell 449n29), as is the female character in "Company Manners" who colourfully pronounces "Bah! . . . Celebrities! What has one to do with them in society? As celebrities they are simply bores . . . The writers of books, for instance, cannot afford to talk twenty pages for nothing, so he is either profoundly silent, or else he gives you the mere rinsings of his mind" (298).

Gaskell is fascinated by these *salons*, which, she writes, are delightful social experiences in France, and dull and boring in England. She writes that "where we matter-of-fact English people are apt to put in praise of the morals and religion of the person whose life we have been writing" (CM 296), Cousin ranks of greater value a hostess who has "all the requisites [to be able to] 'tenir un salon' with honour to herself and pleasure to her friends" (CM 296). Gaskell recalls her "experience in English society; of the evenings dreaded before they came, and sighed over in recollection, because they were so ineffably dull" (CM 296), and aims in this piece of writing to reflect on what it was about French *salons* that made them socially stimulating, so that English society would "discover the lost art of Sabléling"

¹⁵⁵ For example, Gaskell wrote animatedly of Mohl's "amusing and brilliant" salons in a letter to Emily Shaen née Winkworth (*Letters* 750).

(CM 296), of holding a *salon* where women can contribute to an intellectually stimulating conversation as did Madame de Sable in the seventeenth century. It indicates her frustration with England's stuffiness and formality, with its rigid gender roles, dictated largely by the male elite, where women are treated as 'other.'

Gentlemanliness

Gaskell questions the exclusion of women from notions of Englishness, and this emphasis on inclusiveness is also evident in how she depicts gentlemanliness in her writing. The link between gentlemanliness/masculinity and Englishness was not new in the nineteenth century, and shifts in definitions of gentlemanliness in the nineteenth century went hand in hand with changing notions of Englishness. Asa Briggs suggests that the concept of the gentleman is "the necessary link in any analysis of mid-Victorian ways of thinking and behaving" (*Age of Improvement* 411). In the eighteenth century, masculine identity was "conferred, or denied, by men's capacity for gentlemanly social performance" (Cohen 312), and, as Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall argue in *Family Fortunes*, was "based on sport and codes of honour derived from military prowess, finding expression in hunting, riding, drinking and wenching" (312). On the surface, however, hegemonic masculinity in the eighteenth century was ultimately represented by politeness and refinement, associated with hereditary rank – the title of gentleman could be claimed by those of noble birth, as well as by clergymen, army officers, and members of parliament (Gilmour 3).¹⁵⁶ By the mid-nineteenth century, however, the meaning of 'gentle' in 'gentleman' had shifted, from rank and hereditary privilege, to "its modern sense of 'tender'" (Gilmour 86). Manliness became

¹⁵⁶ The word 'gentle' in gentleman originally referred to being of 'gentle' (or noble) birth.

aligned with the capacity to show feeling; an example is Mr. Hale's "deep, manly sobs" (NS 154) at the news of his wife's illness in Gaskell's *North and South* (Gilmour 86).

These changing definitions of *gentleman* meant that this social grouping included, at least in theory, a larger proportion of the English male population, including the developing industrial classes. Indeed, since the evolving concept of a gentleman emphasised behaviour patterns that could be achieved, this concept was able to span classes, and be, in Colls' words, a form of "cultural capital transferable across the whole of society. It was the bridge connecting all polite classes" (*Identity* 77). Moreover, that this was a distinctively *English* phenomenon was observed by Alexis de Tocqueville, who wrote in 1856 that "if we follow the mutations in time and place of the English word 'gentleman' . . . we find its connotation being steadily widened in England as the classes draw nearer to each other and intermingle. In each successive century we find it being applied to men a little lower on the social scale" (qtd. in Gilmour 3). However, whilst there was a flattening of social codes in relation to masculinity, the emphasis on being a 'gentleman' in the Victorian period meant that masculinity was still represented in this period in elite (middle) class terms (Tosh *Manliness* 32). Michael Curtin writes: "those who wanted to learn aristocratic manners perceived the task not as a craven capitulation to a class enemy but as a worthy emulation of high standards" (413). Asa Briggs writes in relation to "the moral component of gentlemanliness . . . the problem was to widen the basis of qualification, without sacrificing the exclusiveness which was the source of the esteem" (*Age of Improvement* 411). Thus, to be a gentleman was the "ultimate benchmark" for middle-class men (Berberich 19).¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁷ This middle-class emphasis in English masculinity was also observed by a Dutch academic, G. J. Reinier, who lived in London in the early twentieth century: "by the English [Reiner] did not mean the working class, and he did not mean women, and he did not mean the other British. He meant the silent, unintellectual, conventional, and reserved middle-

This shift in the qualifications required for the status of gentlemen emphasised manners and morals. The foregrounding of masculine refinement and morals was linked in Victorian minds with England's naturally superior civilization (Cohen 318). Gerard Manley Hopkins wrote in 1883 that "if the English race had done nothing else, yet if they left the world the notion of a gentleman, they would have done a great service to mankind" (qtd. in Gilmour 1). Viewing gentlemanliness in racial terms — as an English institution and a national contribution to civilization — is also evident in this passage from the *Cornhill Magazine* in 1862, written by Sir James Stephen, Gaskell's acquaintance:

The great characteristic of the manners of a gentleman, as we conceive them in England, is plain, downright, frank simplicity. It is meant to be, and to a great extent is, the outward and visible sign of the two great cognate virtues – truth and courage. It is the manner of men who expect each other to say, in the plainest way, just what they mean, and to stand to what they say, with but little regard either for the opinions or for the approbation of others, though with full respect to their feelings. This sturdy mixture of frankness when they do speak, with a perfect willingness to hold their tongues when they have nothing to say, is the great distinguishing feature of educated Englishmen, and is the one which always strikes foreigners with surprise. (qtd. in Dowling 16)

According to Stephen, these distinguishing masculine characteristics of English men (their ability to be frank when occasion demands it and yet silent at other times) are interrelated with what makes them uniquely English. Moreover, as I discussed in chapter one, in the mid-nineteenth century the English linked their 'superior' culture with England's Saxon origins, associated with Protestantism, freedom, liberty, and, critically, with masculinity (Young, *class Englishman*" (qtd. in Colls, *Identity* 82).

Ethnicity 20). Young observes: “to be Saxon was to be masculine” (21). There was, for example, a proliferation of Saxon boys’ names in the nineteenth century (Young 21). It is thus no surprise that in *Wives and Daughters* Roger Hamley, who is from a long line of masculine, Saxon Englishness (WD 228), also has an old English name.¹⁵⁸ In many ways Roger is highly typical of the mid-nineteenth-century gentleman in Gaskell’s writing. On one level, he is an old school gentleman since he has a Saxon pedigree and a genteel background. He does, however, need to prove that he is worthy of his pedigree by displaying the characteristics of a nineteenth-century gentleman, and does so by being truthful and courageous, and by speaking plainly. Roger embodies Samuel Smiles’ ideal, that “above all the [nineteenth-century] gentleman is truthful. He feels that truth is the ‘summit of being’” (qtd. in Dennis and Skilton 55).¹⁵⁹

Developing definitions of gentlemanliness in the Victorian period, in the context of the upwardly mobile middle classes, frequently contrasted Victorian ‘manliness’ with the affectations of gentlemen in the Regency era, which were increasingly perceived in England as Francophile and thus un-English.¹⁶⁰ Moreover, as scholars such as Linda Colley, June Edmunds, and Sean Purchase observe, narrow definitions of masculinity in England in the eighteenth century and into the Regency era, in terms such as referring to Britain/England as John Bull’s island, meant that large sections of society, including women, were excluded

¹⁵⁸ Roger shares his name with the Danish King, Hrodgar, in the Anglo-Saxon epic poem, “Beowulf”, although, by Gaskell’s period, the spelling of this Old English name had been changed slightly to Hrodger by the (French speaking) Normans. Hrodger differed from most Norman names with French origins, however, having a Germanic cognate (Behind the Name. Web. 20 May 2010).

¹⁵⁹ I expand on Roger’s gentlemanly status later in this chapter.

¹⁶⁰ This is argued by scholars such as Robert Colls, Andrew Dowling, Robin Gilmour, and Tamara Wagner

from hegemonic definitions of Englishness.¹⁶¹ National identity was viewed as masculine, in contrast to an effeminate France. Richard Hurd¹⁶² wrote in the latter eighteenth century that, in contrast to the French, “Englishmen should distinguish themselves instead by their native plain, rough manners and, especially, their ‘unpolished integrity’” (qtd. in Cohen 322). French politeness was thus associated in English minds with (effeminate) foppery, dissipation, and despotism (Cohen 318, 322), characteristics of the ‘genteel’ classes in previous English periods, and replaced in the nineteenth century by rugged masculinity.

Gaskell contributes in *North and South* to this shift in changing and widening definitions of gentlemanliness in the nineteenth century. Through her characterisation of the Hales, she initially foregrounds the eighteenth century view by linking the concept of gentleman with the genteel classes. When Mr. Hale first reveals his plan to move to Helstone to tutor the industrial classes, who, he says, are “conscious of their own deficiencies” (NS 37), Margaret scornfully questions its value: “A private tutor! . . . What in the world do manufacturers want with the classics, or literature, or the accomplishments of a gentleman?” (NS 37). Margaret here expresses the eighteenth century view that manufacturers are not gentlemen, and therefore do not need a gentleman’s education. However, a little later in the novel, after Margaret’s developing appreciation of the new manufacturing class has begun, the novel records a discussion between her and John Thornton, who, as a manufacturer, is, by definition, no eighteenth century gentleman. In

¹⁶¹ Even the female symbol of Britannia was appropriated to represent male hegemony. Britannia was a trope in the nineteenth century for masculine naval power and imperial conquests, and was often portrayed standing next to the sea or tall sailing ships. Her warrior stance was emphasised in drawings in this period with the addition of a trident, a three-pronged military weapon, as well as, frequently, a shield. For a fuller reading on Britannia see Deirdre David’s *Rule Britannia* (1995).

¹⁶² Hurd (1720-1808) was an English writer and Bishop of Worcester.

their discussion of the concept of what it means to be a gentleman, Thornton rejects the eighteenth century view of this term, stating that:

“I take it that ‘gentleman’ is a term that only describes a person in his relation to others; but when we speak of him as ‘a man,’ we consider him not merely with regard to his fellow-men, but in relation to himself, - to life – to time – to eternity. A cast-away lonely as Robinson Crusoe – a prisoner immured in a dungeon for life – nay, even a saint in Patmos, has his endurance, his strength, his faith, best described by being spoken of as ‘a man.’ I am rather weary of this word ‘gentlemanly,’ which seems to me to be often inappropriately used, and often, too, with such exaggerated distortion of meaning, while the full simplicity of the noun ‘man,’ and the adjective ‘manly’ are unacknowledged – that I am induced to class it with the cant of the day.” (NS 150)

Thornton articulates in this speech the changing perceptions of masculinity during the first half of the nineteenth century. In contrast to earlier periods in which the aristocratic social dandy was classified a ‘gentleman’ simply because he was born to be so – “his relation to others” – the qualifications for gentlemen changed during the nineteenth century. Many, like Thornton, emphasised what a man did – his manliness – rather than his rank. Indeed, as part of the emerging middle classes, Thornton can be classified as a gentleman precisely because of his character and conduct, and, in this context, heredity has no relevance. Samuel Smiles wrote in 1859 that “riches and rank have no necessary connection with gentlemanly qualities. The poor man may be a true gentleman – in spirit and in daily life” (327). Indeed, Gaskell crafts Thornton’s character carefully, as can be seen in her comment in a letter: “Thornton is good: and I’m afraid of a touch marring him; and I want to keep his character consistent with itself, and large and strong and tender, and *yet a master*. That’s my next

puzzle" (*Letters* 321).¹⁶³ Gaskell does, however, complicate her portrayal of Thornton to some extent by including in his characterisation his study of the classics, a marker of an 'old-style' gentleman, indicated by Margaret's comment, quoted above. Moreover, as discussed in chapter three, his desire to dress 'up' for tea with the Hales also indicates his desire to move 'up' socially. In some ways, then, Thornton, despite being part of the new generation of middle-class gentlemen, practises the values of a previous era. At the same time, Thornton's rise, too, indicates Gaskell's middle-class ideal of people progressing up the social ranks through various means of social improvement. Indeed, as I will discuss shortly in the section on Christian Socialism, education was a key element in this ideal.¹⁶⁴

One aspect of gentlemanly character, in this context of changing definitions of masculinity, was the willingness to work. Indeed, the middle-class cultural value of work and industry was emphasised in the mid-nineteenth century in contrast and as a foil to the presumed profligacy and idleness of the aristocracy, and, to a lesser extent, the perceived financial recklessness of the working-classes (Boiko 98). Davidoff and Hall make a similar observation that between 1780 and 1850 the English middle classes could be distinguished from, on the one hand, the dissolute and fainéant aristocracy and, on the other hand, the feckless urban poor (*Family Fortunes*, xviii). Moreover, in a time when he felt threatened on various fronts, work gave the middle-class man a sense of identity and purpose (Rose 67).¹⁶⁵

¹⁶³ This letter was written to Emily Shaen on 27 October, 1854, from Lea Hurst, home of the Nightingale family, where she also wrote part of *North and South*.

¹⁶⁴ We see especially in her characterisation of John Thornton that, unlike writers of a previous generation, such as Jane Austen in *Emma*, Gaskell did not disdain people in "trade." Indeed, many of her contemporaries in Manchester, such as the brothers Samuel and William Rathbone Greg, were prominent factory owners – and members of her husband's congregation.

¹⁶⁵ Sonya O. Rose (67) identifies that middle-class men felt threatened on various fronts, including the growing women's movement, labour unrest, immigration, as well a general growth in consumerism and new leisure activities. These factors threatened middle-class

It also enabled men without rank to attain the social standing of a financially 'independent' man, an essential manly characteristic which at the same time gave him the 'right' of English citizenship and hence, in a political sense, Englishness (McCormack 2).¹⁶⁶

Work was thus a 'bridge' for the middle classes to attain the 'right' to gentlemanliness that previously belonged to the landed aristocracy. In the following excerpt from *North and South*, (middle-class) John Thornton distances himself from "the poorness of character" (NS 79) of both the aristocracy and the working classes by recounting how he became a man through hard work, thrift, and self denial – characteristics valued by the middle classes, not least because they could be learned:

"Sixteen years ago, my father died under very miserable circumstances. I was taken from school, and had to become a *man* . . . in a few days . . . I got employment in a draper's shop . . . Week by week, our income came to fifteen shillings, out of which three people had to be kept. My mother managed so that I put by three out of these fifteen shillings regularly. This made the beginning; *this taught me self-denial* . . . Now when I feel that in my own case it is not good luck, nor merit, nor talent,– but simply *the habits of life which taught me to despise indulgences not thoroughly earned*,– indeed never to think twice about them, – I believe that this suffering, which Miss Hale thinks is impressed on the countenances of the people of Milton, is but the natural punishment of dishonestly-enjoyed pleasure, at some former period of their lives. *I do not look*

definitions of masculinity which included (economic) independence gained through hard work.

¹⁶⁶ Matthew McCormack's study on *The Independent Man: Citizenship and Gender Politics in Georgian England* (2005) helpfully explores the shift in 'independence' away from the landed aristocracy to anyone able to sustain himself financially. McCormack argues that implied in this emphasis on 'independence' is that dependents lacked the moral capacity to participate in citizenship rites such as the franchise.

on self-indulgent, sensual people as worthy of my hatred; I simply look upon them with contempt for their poorness of character.” (NS 78-9, emphasis mine)

Thornton highlights a number of key middle-class values in this speech, including the dignity of work, as well as the rewards of hard work in being able to pull oneself up (and out of poverty) by one’s bootstraps. Rob Breton writes: “Thornton is as if born into the wrong class, made before he made himself” (82). Thornton has learned masculine traits through developing strength of character evidenced in learning “the habits of life” that lead to material success. Implied in this view is that poverty (as experienced by the working classes) is associated with “poorness of character,” “natural punishment” for “self-indulgent” behaviour. And so, Thornton upholds the middle-class maxim that “God helps those who help themselves.”

The Protestant work ethic is clearly present here. The term was coined by a German sociologist, Max Weber, in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1905), a series of essays that identified the origin of the value of capitalism’s focus on thrift, self-discipline, and hard work in the theology of the Protestant theologians, Martin Luther and John Calvin. Weber argued that a shift in attitudes towards work occurred during the Reformation when (Protestant) people were no longer assured of their salvation by the intercessory priestly roles found in the Roman Catholic Church, but had to assuage their anxieties (and to ensure their salvation) in other ways, most notably in their vocational ‘calling’ (work) in which profit was the inevitable fruit of the hard work of the “sober, middle-class, self-made man” (Weber 163). In this context, the refusal to work was considered in Victorian society to be “a moral and social sin” (Houghton 189), a sentiment echoed by John Thornton. While Weber’s thesis has been modified by scholars, his essential point that Protestant Christianity (in its various forms, including English Puritanism) did, as R.H. Tawney writes, embrace capitalism’s

“energies and fortified its already vigorous temper” (226) has some validity.¹⁶⁷ I would not go so far as Breton, who argues that the Victorian “Gospel of Work” (3) – that is, the notion that the blessing of work has intrinsic value in itself – would have developed irrespective of the Protestant work ethic (22). Since Protestantism was so firmly rooted in Englishness in the nineteenth century, it is impossible to separate it from English views of work, and so Protestantism contributed to the work ethic of its milieu. The Victorian work ethic was thus not a bolt out of the blue. At the same time, it was a reaction to the changing social and economic roles in England resulting from industrialisation, a way to find stability and meaning within England’s changing society (Travers 340). It was an ideology that legitimised industry and trade in which material profits were seen to be good, a positive outcome of industriousness. In the period prior to the Reformation, the clergy portrayed earning profits from trade negatively (Meakin 37). The Protestant work ethic reversed this thinking, enabling trade to become a legitimate enterprise in the nineteenth century.

I agree with Martin A. Danahay’s view that the Victorians had a particular version of the Protestant work ethic and that this ethic was integrally connected to male Victorian identity to the exclusion of females. Danahay writes that manliness and work were “assumed to be equivalent terms” (8-9), and notes further that “perhaps the most important

¹⁶⁷ Robert W. Green’s *Protestantism and Capitalism: The Weber Thesis and Its Critics* is a helpful introduction to Weber and his critics. Scholars who have critiqued Weber’s thesis include Ephraim Fischhoff (in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism: The History of a Controversy*, 1944), Kurt Samuelsson (in *Religion and Economic Action*, 1957), and R.H. Tawney (in *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*, 1926). These critiques question Weber’s claims of the cause-and-effect relationship between Calvinism and capitalism, as well as Weber’s representations of both Calvinism (did Weber’s observations misrepresent Calvinism?) and of capitalism (did Weber, for example, exaggerate the importance of ascetism, and, moreover, what contribution – if any – did thrift actually have on the creation of the vast fortunes of the capitalist?). More recent criticism is found, for example, in Rob Breton’s *Gospels and Grit* (2005) in which he argues that Weber’s theory is too monolithic since the work ethic is far more nuanced than Weber’s description of it.

distinction between the original Protestant work ethic and its Victorian version is the internalization of the compulsion to work as a mark of masculine morality" (8). The emphasis, therefore, was on the working out of a self-imposed sense of moral duty rather than of an economic necessity. Work was considered a necessary ingredient for the health of a man's body and mind; self-discipline in hard work helped check unruly inner desires. The Rev. R. Shilleto makes this view clear in a letter to the headmaster of Harrow: "Do, my dear Montagu, throw into your Sixth Form your own love of work. Make them feel the manliness, the health, the duty . . . of work" (qtd. in Danahay 8). The ethic of work thus had a moral underpinning which, in turn, helped shape a masculine identity that was not only of value for the individual but intrinsically bound up in contributing to constantly changing notions of Englishness (Gervais, *Literary Englands* 4).

The impetus of this masculine moral duty was not divine authority, however, as it may have been for theologians of earlier periods, but was, as Danahay states, "a discipline that originated within the subject" (8). John Thornton does not demonstrate any religious impetus – such as anxiety about his salvation – for his work ethic. Indeed, as Tosh notes, "what drives Mr. Thornton is not the elevated calling of the Evangelicals, but the single-minded attention to making money which has brought him from inauspicious beginnings as the son of a bankrupt and suicide, to be a prominent Manchester manufacturer. He speaks for the new entrepreneurial class of early Victorian England" (*Manliness* 85-6). Thus, whilst Thornton embodies such values as self-denial and thriftiness, these need to be situated in redefinitions of the Protestant work ethic in the nineteenth century, where the emphasis was largely on middle-class constructions of masculinity in which work, morality, and manliness were tightly linked.

David Kuchta (153) further situates these constructions of masculinity in the context of the struggle for laissez-faire capitalism in Britain, loosely situated between the publication of Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations* in 1776 and the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846.¹⁶⁸ Thornton's manliness is not based on Evangelical notions of a Protestant work ethic, but resembles Samuel Smiles' views of masculinity and the self-made man (282).¹⁶⁹ Smiles recognised in the redefinitions of masculinity in the nineteenth century a re-formation of the cultural emphasis on English freedoms, firmly linked with laissez-faire capitalism, as necessary for the well-being of the nation and which partly contributed to the overarching optimism of the nineteenth century in man's ability to achieve material success (Travers 339). In this context, the nation was defined – in contrast to aristocratic consumers of wealth – as middle-class, industrious, and frugal (Kuchta 157). Thornton, as a “manly toiler,” is part of the emerging middle class redefining an Englishness in which financial wealth generated by the Industrial Revolution is now seen as an essential part of being English.

Not all industrialists are portrayed in this way in this novel, however. Gaskell contrasts Thornton with his manufacturing colleagues, also factory owners. While on one level they are gentlemen, they lack the gentlemanly polish valued by the middle classes. As discussed above, Thornton's learning of self-discipline and self-control in his rise from poverty to wealth qualifies him to be a gentleman. Leslie Stephen included “frank simplicity” in his description of a gentleman in the *Cornhill Magazine* in 1862 (qtd. in Dowling 16), and Margaret sees this quality in Thornton at his dinner party: “his whole manner, as master of

¹⁶⁸ Smith's *An Inquiry in the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* was first published by W. Strahan and T. Cadell, London, 1776. It is a treatise arguing for the principle of free trade, and is still one of the principal texts for modern economic theory today. The repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846 which deregulated the importing/exporting of cereals in Britain was an outcome of Smith's economic principles.

¹⁶⁹ Smiles, Gaskell's contemporary, wrote *Self-Help* (1859), based on a speech he gave in 1845 titled *The Education of the Working Classes*.

the house, and entertainer of his friends, was so straightforward, yet simple and modest, as to be thoroughly dignified" (NS 148).¹⁷⁰ She also notes that "she had never seen him to so much advantage" (NS 148), and she concludes that this difference has to do with whom he is associating at a given moment. When he associates with those socially superior to him (such as the Hales) in their home, he appears "over-eager" (NS 148) and having "that kind of vexed annoyance which seemed ready to pre-suppose that he was unjustly judged, and yet felt too proud to try and make himself better understood" (NS 148-49). In contrast, when Thornton associates with the mill-owners in his own home, the novel implies his social superiority over them:

But now, among his fellows, there was no uncertainty as to his position. He was regarded by them as a man of great force of character; of power in many ways. There was no need to struggle for their respect. He had it, and he knew it; and the security of this gave a fine grand quietness to his voice and ways, which Margaret had missed before. (NS 149)

While Thornton has achieved the characteristics of a gentleman, as valued by the middle classes, his associates trail behind him in their acquisition of these qualities. In contrast to Mr. Thornton's quiet, authoritative calm, they are portrayed as excitable and nervous about the impending workers' strike and the mill owners' plans to import Irish labour to replace the striking workers. John Thornton thus 'makes it' into the category of a middle-class gentleman, whereas the other mill owners are not yet 'there.'

¹⁷⁰ Jennifer Phegley notes how the *Cornhill Magazine* contributed to redefinitions of gentlemanliness for the benefit of its middle class readers, in which gentlemen are portrayed as "at the head of the British nation both morally and culturally as well as politically and economically" (29). Gaskell had a longstanding relationship with *Cornhill Magazine*, which published several of her fictional works including *Wives and Daughters*.

Mr. Gibson in *Wives and Daughters* is another representative of an emerging new style of gentleman, not as a factory-owner like Thornton, but, rather, as a doctor. His professional ethos contrasts with the idleness of the aristocracy, and he demonstrates manliness through his professional behaviour. Henry Byerley Thomson firmly situates this kind of manly behaviour in the middle classes, stating in *The Choice of a Profession* (1857) that “the professional classes can hardly be over-rated, they form the head of the English middle class, maintain its tone of independence, keep up to the mark its standard of morality, and direct its intelligence” (5).¹⁷¹ Gibson is part of the newly fashioned professional gentleman class, which sets the standard of acceptable English behaviour, including the middle-class idea that true gentility is not characterised by idleness. Rather, masculine respectability comes by way of an honest day’s work, which Gibson accomplishes through the professional and conscientious care of his patients.¹⁷²

The relationship between the middle-class values of work and moral character is frequently portrayed in mid-Victorian fiction by contrasting physical appearance and inner

¹⁷¹ Thomson includes the following in the professional class: “Divines, lawyers, medical men, officers in the army, officers in the navy, persons in the higher branches of the civil service of the crown, painters, and sculptors, architects, engineers, actuaries, &c, musicians, and actors, educators, and men of letters.” He then divides these up into two principal classes: the *privileged* and the *unprivileged* professions, the difference being whether they are “regulated by law, and are closed . . .” (3-4). Mr. Gibson is a doctor and would have been considered a *privileged* professional.

¹⁷² My focus is on constructs of masculinity and professionalism in the nineteenth century located in the middle classes, which Gaskell illustrates in characters such as Mr. Gibson. I am mindful, however, of Susan E. Colón who argues persuasively that Gaskell undermined these popular constructs of professionalism particularly in *My Lady Ludlow* in which Gaskell normalises female professional contributions in, for example, the character of Miss Galindo, who does clerical work. Gaskell’s point is not in the first place about gender but about widening notions of professionalism, since she also includes in this novella the professional rise of a male character, Harry Gregson, who comes from a poor, labouring family. This demonstrates once again Gaskell’s progressive slant in democratising Englishness in her fiction where she seeks to include a wider range of the English population in to notions of Englishness, albeit, as always, within middle-class constraints.

character. In this contrast, the point is made that, like rank, physical beauty is secondary to behaviour, to integrity, and to moral character (Gilmour 88).¹⁷³ Thus, in a middle-class context, status had nothing to do with rank or physical appearance, but could be developed and learned by anyone willing to work at it. Gaskell contributes to these constructions of middle-class values in *Wives and Daughters*, which contrasts beauty and goodness in order to separate physical elegance and moral character. Rather, it links moral, gentlemanly character to plain looks. Mr. Preston, the Cumnors' land agent, is a case in point. He is described as "very handsome, and knew it" (WD 153), but is certainly no saint. On the contrary, he is portrayed as self-seeking and conniving in attempting to blackmail Cynthia into marrying him, and is depicted as culpable in Molly's disgrace after she meets with Preston on Cynthia's behalf to ask him to return the letters Cynthia has written to him. Indeed, the novel records that even Preston recognises that his behaviour would be construed as un-gentlemanly by genteel society. After Molly threatens to speak to Lady Harriet Cumnor about him, requesting that Lady Harriet speak to her father, Lord Cumnor, about the matter, she concludes with, "I don't think you will dare to refuse Lord Cumnor" (WD 482). Preston muses that:

He felt at once that he should not dare; that, clever land-agent as he was, and high up in the earl's favour on that account, yet that the conduct of which he had been guilty about these letters, and the threats which he had held out about them, were just what *no gentleman, no honourable man, no manly man*, could put up with in any one about him. He knew that much, and he wondered how

¹⁷³Writers that deal with the image of the English gentleman include Charles Dickens, Anthony Trollope and William Makepeace Thackeray (Gilmour 2). Gilmour (87-8) and Boiko (98) note that, unlike John Ruskin, who argued that the two concepts were linked, these authors separate physical appearance and the capacity for fine feeling in order to elevate the middle class value of character.

she, the girl standing before him, had been clever enough to find it out. (WD 482, emphasis mine)

Preston recognises that Molly is cognisant of the developing code of masculinity in which a gentleman's chivalry is firmly rooted in moral character, something they both know is lacking in his behaviour.¹⁷⁴ Gaskell emphasises further that Preston is no "honourable man" (WD 482) by contrasting his sexual awareness with Molly's purity and innocence: "there was something that struck him most of all perhaps, *and which shows the kind of man he was* – he perceived that Molly was as unconscious that he was a young man, and she a young woman, as if she had been a pure angel in heaven" (WD 482-83, emphasis mine). Despite this, however, Preston's next thought is not to behave honourably to this virginal girl and pass over the letters, but to think about his next move "so as still to evade making any concession" (WD 483). Chivalric behaviour included respect for women, and this, in turn, was considered in English society to be integrally linked with English progress and "the mark of a civilized and refined nation" (Boiko 318). Preston's behaviour, however, respects neither Cynthia nor Molly. Nor does he protect Molly's reputation after he and Molly are seen by Mr. Sheepshanks, who concludes the worst. Preston is no gentleman, and thus, by implication, is not part of the 'in group' defined by middle-class Englishness in the nineteenth century.

¹⁷⁴ Cohen argues for the need to "acknowledge chivalry's plural meanings and resist the attempt to reduce it to a coherent phenomenon" (315). At the same time, chivalry from the late eighteenth century onward was commonly associated with qualities such as "manliness, bravery, loyalty, courtesy, truthfulness, purity, honor, and a strong sense of protection toward the weak and oppressed" (Cohen 326). Women were perceived as ranking with "the weak," and thus the protection of women was a paramount virtue for all chivalrous men. An influential book on chivalry in the nineteenth century was Kenelm Digby's *The Broad Stone of Honour; or, Rules for the Gentlemen of England*, published in 1823.

Another physically beautiful but flawed character in *Wives and Daughters* is Mrs. Gibson, Molly Gibson's selfish and foolish stepmother, introduced in the novel as "the most beautiful person [Molly] had ever seen . . . a very lovely woman" (WD 16). Mrs. Gibson, however, clings tenaciously to eighteenth century ideals of hereditary rank seen, for example, in her fawning over the heir to the Hamley estate, Osborne Hamley, who she assumes to be rich since he comes from an old family. She sees him as a potential husband for her daughter, Cynthia, until she finds out that he is terminally ill, after which she focuses on the next heir in line, Roger Hamley. One of the few books that Mrs. Gibson brings with her when she moves into Mr. Gibson's home after they marry is the *Peerage*, which she studies intently. The novel observes that she "studied 'Monteith, Duke of, Adolphus George,' &c. &c., till she was fully up in all the duchess's connections, and probable interests" (WD 275). Moreover, her values about work are rooted in a previous era. She reasons: "am I to go all my life toiling and moiling for money? It's not natural. Marriage is the natural thing; then the husband has all that kind of dirty work to do, and his wife sits in the drawing-room like a lady" (WD 98). While on one count she fits into her nineteenth-century milieu by validating the middle-class separation of spheres in recognising that work is a masculine pursuit, she fails, however, to understand her husband's work ethic by chiding him for working so hard and thus missing out on social engagements, including dinner.

In contrast to beautiful but flawed characters such as Preston and Mrs. Gibson, Roger Hamley is homely, introduced in the novel as "really ugly" (WD 165), a man of whom his father says, "no one who sees him in the street will ever think that red-brown, big-boned, clumsy chap is of gentle blood" (WD 74). To Molly, too, at first "he simply appeared 'heavy-looking, clumsy'" (WD 86), but, as the novel progresses, Molly changes her mind, seeing him instead as a kind, pleasant, courteous, respectful young man, with a strong sense of humour

(WD 165). Not only does Roger demonstrate positive personal qualities, but also he is willing to work, a trait evident in his success at university, as well as his scientific research and documentation. In presenting characters such as Roger and Mr. Gibson as workers, therefore, Gaskell contributes to middle-class notions in the nineteenth century that masculine character and a willingness to work go together, and that these are necessary qualities for gentlemanly behaviour. Gaskell does so in a context where the middle classes needed to validate their position as being of greater social value than the (supposed) idleness of the land-owning upper classes. Characters such as Mrs. Gibson and Mr. Preston, then, get it wrong in assuming that there is inherent value in hereditary rank and physical appearance.

English masculinity was connected in nineteenth-century English thinking with England's racial superiority and an English stiff upper lip – emotional reserve and self-control (Dowling 1). Indeed, this is Sussman's argument, discussed above in definitions of masculinity in the nineteenth century, where he defines manhood in relation to the Victorian value of "continued demanding self-discipline" (13). The English developed this mask of masculine self-control in order to control others, especially those outside popular definitions of Englishness (Colls, *Identity* 83). An example of this willpower in Gaskell's writing is that exhibited by John Thornton over his associates, discussed above. Indeed, a defining characteristic of masculinity was the association between the bodily and emotional (moral) self-control of English young men, and their ability to shape and control their destinies (Hall, *Muscular Christianity* 7).

An important means of teaching self-control was through the popularization of cricket.¹⁷⁵ Colls writes that, in the development of self-control, “cricket was preferred. The upper lip had to stay stiff, the bat had to stay straight, the grip had to stay secret” (*Identity* 83). Indeed, by 1888, cricket was declared by A.G. Steele to be the national game (Colls, *Identity* 122; Briggs, *Essays* 199), not least because all classes played it (although rarely in the same team). Colls adds: “Redolent of the aristocratic code, but constitutionally reformed in the 1860s so that there was room for all, cricket was one of those coded gestures which made men Englishmen” (*Identity* 122). Keith A.P. Sandiford makes a similar point about the Englishness to be found in nineteenth-century cricket: “it was an exclusively English creation unsullied by Oriental or European influences” (303). Cricket thus became England’s national game; its strict rules and conduct emphasised fair play and self-control, essential qualities of an English gentleman.¹⁷⁶

Gaskell contributes to this point of view in her characterisation of Mr. Coxe in *Wives and Daughters*. The over-riding fault of the hapless Coxe is his lack of emotional reserve when his uncontrolled calf-love for Molly Gibson sets in motion the events of the remainder of the novel. Coxe, one of Mr. Gibson’s apprentices, who lives in the house with the Gibsons, falls in love with Molly, and writes her a “flaming love-letter . . . [in which he] professed himself unable to go on seeing her day after day without speaking to her of the passion she had inspired – an ‘eternal passion’” (WD 49). He attempts to pass on this letter through

¹⁷⁵ That cricket was the English national game and closely linked with English public schools is epitomised on the front cover page of the 1869 edition of Thomas Hughes’ *Tom Brown’s Schooldays*, which is an illustration by pre-Raphaelite painter Arthur Hughes (not related to Thomas Hughes) of a young English schoolboy at Rugby School playing cricket. This illustration has been reprinted on the cover of the Oxford World’s Classics’ edition of *Tom Brown’s Schooldays*, published in 1989.

¹⁷⁶ Steele was writing in the period before professional cricket; in fact, he argued strongly against it, seeing in professional cricket the demise of the game.

Bethia the maid, but Gibson intercepts it. In his ensuing discussion with Coxe, Gibson focuses his displeasure on Coxe's unmanly (and un-English) inability to control his passions. Gibson states that, rather than let them run unabated, a better solution to Coxe's feelings would be a masculine distraction, such as joining the Hollingford Cricket Club (WD 53). In the discussion between these men, it becomes evident that Coxe needs educating in the area of "domestic honour" (WD 52) – he may be known as one of the "young gentlemen as they were called in [Gibson's] household" (WD 45), but his rash declaration of passion and his unmanly excitability (WD 55) indicate that he has a long way to go. Joining the local Cricket Club would not only redirect his passion, but would also train him in the self-control that characterised an English gentleman. Playing cricket was more than a pastime for lovesick young men. It was a means of training in Englishness.

Public School Influence

Gaskell's characterisation of Roger Hamley in *Wives and Daughters* can be linked to the increasing influence of public schools in England in the nineteenth century: he receives his public school education at Rugby (WD 43). Rugby was an English public school that achieved fame through the educational innovations of Thomas Arnold when he was its headmaster (1828-1841). Arnold was a leader in a public school ethos based on moral principles, gentlemanly conduct, and, to a lesser extent, intellectual ability (Gilmour 94). Rugby differed from more traditional public schools in its aim to produce a 'new' variety of gentleman. This is reflected in a comment by Lord Ashley (later the seventh Earl of Shaftsbury) in 1844:

I fear Eton . . . It makes admirable gentlemen and finished scholars – fits a man, beyond all competition, for the dining-room, the Club, St James's Street, and all the mysteries of social elegance; *but it does not make the man required for the*

future generation. We must have nobler, deeper, and sterner stuff; less of refinement and more of truth; more of the inward, not so much of the outward, gentleman.” (qtd. in Tosh, *Manliness* 84, emphasis mine)

Arnold's emphasis at Rugby, then, was not on maintaining an outdated social code, but rather on translating inner character into action. In Thomas Hughes' *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, published in 1857, Squire Brown sends his son to Rugby to become a "brave, helpful, truth-telling Englishman . . . a gentleman" (80).¹⁷⁷ Indeed, in Gaskell's novel, Roger is sent to Rugby by his father, also a squire, to prepare him for survival in English society, so that Roger will not turn out as his father did: "imperfectly educated, and ignorant on many points . . . awkward and ungainly in society" (WD 42). Squire Hamley recognises that a public school education is necessary to become a gentleman. Whereas in previous generations, warfare, for example, was a vital skill, by the nineteenth century a gentleman needed a more sophisticated knowledge, to be obtained primarily at a public school (Waters 18).

The impact of public schools was two-fold in English social history. They produced the new, nineteenth-century gentleman, and they witnessed the mixing of sons from 'old' families and the new middle classes (Briggs, *Victorian People* 152-53). Briggs writes: "[the] public school provided for the gradual fusion of classes and their drawing upon a common store of values" (*Victorian People* 153). Edward Thring, a key educationalist of his time and headmaster of Uppingham (1853-1888), describes this fusion as dropping rank:

The learning to be responsible and independent, to bear pain, to play the game, to drop rank, and wealth, and home luxury, is a priceless boon. I think myself that it is this which has made the *English* such an adventurous race; and that with all

¹⁷⁷ There is no extant information on whether Gaskell knew Thomas Hughes or whether she read his book, *Tom Brown's Schooldays*. She did, however, know Thomas Arnold, at least to some extent (Unsworth 93), depicted as the perfect schoolmaster in Hughes' novel.

their faults . . . *the public schools are the cause of this 'manliness.'* (qtd. in Rutherford 14, emphasis mine)

At the same time, public schools were private fee-paying schools and this meant that they were affordable only for the wealthy, such as the Hamley brothers and Lord Hollingford's sons (WD 37). Acquiring manliness at a public school was, at best, achievable only by those who could afford it, and largely excluded the sons of tradesmen, farmers, and workers (Tosh, *Manliness* 85). There was also a gender bias in public schools since the curriculum was centred on the classics and thus deemed unsuitable for females. Dodd concludes that "the core of the curriculum *was* masculinity" (5), and that the role of public schools was to guard "English cultural life" (5). It was a masculine environment, separated from the feminine, domestic influence of mothers and sisters, which encouraged English boys to mature into English (gentle)men (Tosh, *New Men* 13).¹⁷⁸ The public schools thus helped define (and narrow) what Englishness meant in the nineteenth century.

Public schools also became key places for the dissemination of views about English racial and moral superiority. After the Emancipation Act of 1838, for example, the English not only still considered themselves superior to non-whites, but also morally superior to countries such as the United States of America because the latter still practised the slave trade (Walvin, "Symbols" 243, 251). Arnold's view of public school education as a national enterprise is evident in his comment that a "thorough English gentleman, - Christian, manly, and enlightened, - is more, I believe, than Guizot or Sismondi could comprehend; it is a finer specimen of human nature than any other country, I believe, could furnish" (qtd. in Stanley

¹⁷⁸ Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall make a similar point in *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class* (356).

2:339).¹⁷⁹ Arnold thus linked manliness and public school education as peculiarly *English*, in contrast to the ‘other’ living across the English Channel, and thus closely aligned with English national identity.

While *Wives and Daughters* is set in the time that Arnold was headmaster of Rugby, Gaskell was actually writing in the period after his death, and, to some extent at least, contributed to ongoing constructions of public school masculinity. Arnold’s disciples, such as Thomas Hughes in *Tom Brown’s Schooldays*, helped perpetuate the “Arnold legend” (Gilmour 94), in which Arnold’s emphasis on moral qualities and character building is applied, by emphasising athleticism and sportsmanship in order to change English public school boys into English gentlemen (Briggs, *Victorian People* 161-62; Gilmour 95). Indeed, Briggs comments that while Arnold died in 1842, his influence was greater in the middle of the nineteenth century than during his lifetime (*Victorian People* 155). Rugby’s link with Englishness can be deduced from a quotation from *Rugby Magazine*, dated 1835, that the boys at Rugby “form a complete social body,” such that this social body is not only a “localized metaphoric body [but is] the materialized embodiment of ‘England’ itself, a synecdoche that stands for the nation as a whole” (qtd. in Hall, *Muscular Christianity* 119). The public schools, then, promoted a particular version of Englishness in which the students represented England.

This was reinforced just prior to the Public Schools Act in 1868 after a decade of investigation into public school education by Sir James Stephen, who wrote that “neither the

¹⁷⁹ Francois Guizot (1787-1884) was a prominent nineteenth-century French historian and politician, and prime minister of France when Arnold penned this letter. Jean de Sismondi, who was Swiss French, is best known for his scholarship in French and Italian history, and his critique of the capitalist system of economics, including that of the English factory system. It is of interest that Gaskell knew Guizot, albeit after Arnold’s death, Guizot being involved with the English Christian Socialists (Unsworth 103).

British jury, nor the House of Lords, nor the Church of England, nay scarcely the monarchy itself, seems so deeply enshrined in the bosoms of our countrymen as our public schools” (qtd. in Briggs, *Victorian People* 151). Indeed, the Commissioners of the Schools Act highlighted the central place public schools had in fostering the English qualities of English gentlemen, described as “their capacity to govern others, and to control themselves, their aptitude in combining freedom with order, their public spirit, their vigour and manliness of character, their strong but not slavish respect for public opinion, their love of healthy sports and exercise” (qtd. in Briggs, *Victorian People* 169). Not only is Roger Hamley (in *Wives and Daughters*) clearly a successful product of this education, but he shows the qualities of public school education favoured by Arnold’s disciples. Thus, Gaskell’s emphasis is not only on Roger’s character and desire to work, but, as is seen below, also on his physical fitness.

Not only is Roger educated at Rugby but also he attends Cambridge University,¹⁸⁰ a common educational pathway for sons from genteel families in the nineteenth century and in many ways an extension of public school ideology.¹⁸¹ John Henry Newman, the influential theologian, stated in 1852 that, like the function of public schools, a primary role of universities was “the nurturing . . . of gentlemen” (qtd. in Dennis and Skilton 51). Paul Deslandes comments in his study of “Oxbridge Men” that university life was in many ways a microcosm of England (x). Indeed, as suggested in 1858 by Hugh Reginald Haweis, himself a Cambridge graduate, it was where the “puny youngster . . . [is converted] into the muscular man” (qtd. in Deslandes 51). *The Times* described this muscular man in 1863, one year

¹⁸⁰ Pam Morris writes in her notes to the Penguin edition of *Wives and Daughters* that, whilst Cambridge trailed Edinburgh University, it was at the forefront of the English universities in scientific research. She notes that the influential British Association for the Advancement of Science was in the main a network of Cambridge graduates (n7 656). Gaskell thus got it right in her choice of Cambridge (rather than Oxford) for Roger.

¹⁸¹ Between 1855 and 1899, 80% of Oxford University and Cambridge University students came from public schools (Dodd 4).

before Gaskell wrote *Wives and Daughters*, as someone who “must be able to ride, to shoot, to fish, and to play cricket . . . There is much more than what we may commonly understand by intellectual powers involved in the education of the English public man. It gives them moral and physical health” (qtd. in Morris xxx). English education became broader through the Oxbridge system, where the emphasis was not only on intellectual rigour but also on “moral and physical health.”

Demonstrating the effects of this emphasis on physical and moral health – both at public school and at university – Roger is described as a “good and steady fellow” (WD 66), “a tall powerfully-made young man, giving the impression of strength rather than elegance” (WD 86). He is certainly no feminized dandy. Further, “his face was rather square, ruddy-coloured” (WD 86), evidence of outdoors activities. As I discussed at greater length in chapter one, Roger is a keen naturalist, who develops his obvious academic talents outside the classroom. Already when he is at Cambridge, his success is attributed not only to his “mental powers” (WD 367), but also to his “perfect health, which enabled him to work harder and more continuously than most men without suffering” (WD 367). As Mr. Gibson comments, Roger has a “thoroughly good constitution” (WD 367). Roger goes from strength to strength; when he returns from Africa he is observed by the doctor to be “broader, stronger – more muscular” (WD 589).

Roger is contrasted in this to his brother, Osborne, also a public school graduate but one who does not meet the mark. Molly first sees Osborne in a painting in his mother’s sitting-room, depicted reading, and concludes that he is beautiful, to which Mrs. Hamley concurs, saying, “yes . . . he was a beautiful boy. Roger was never to be compared with him” (WD 65). It is Osborne who spends his time indoors, writing poetry, rather than Roger. Gaskell has a degree of sympathy for Osborne, and portrays him as a serious young man, and

yet it was about men such as Osborne Hamley that W. Turley wrote in 1872 that “a nation of effeminate enfeebled bookworms scarcely forms the most effective bulwark of a nation’s liberties” (qtd. in Dodd 5). Effeminacy was linked in English minds with Francophile behaviour, a point I discuss in the section below. It is, therefore, the mid-Victorian public school mode of masculinity, modelled by Roger Hamley, which succeeds in *Wives and Daughters*. Osborne has a successive number of failures, ending in his death. In her depiction of the two brothers, Gaskell upholds the idea that to be English one needs to be vigorous and manly.

Writing in a period of investigation into the public school system, Gaskell contributed to the model propounded by Arnold’s disciples in the mid-Victorian period. At the same time, as my discussion of Gilbert Dawson in “The Sexton’s Hero” will show, Gaskell also questions this type of masculinity by introducing a ‘manly man’ who exhibits ‘softer’ characteristics which, in the nineteenth century, were more frequently associated with female behaviour. Rather than portraying this as negative and un-English behaviour, however, Gaskell shows Dawson exhibiting positive behaviour that all English men (and women) should emulate. In a story such as this, then, Gaskell extends common notions of public school masculinity to include, at least to some extent, ‘softer’ characteristics, pointing again to her version of Englishness, which seeks to include rather than to exclude a wider range of men and women. This raises a question, however: why are Dawson’s ‘softer’ (‘feminized’) characteristics validated, whereas Osborne Hamley’s in *Wives and Daughters* are not? The answer to this can be seen in Gaskell’s wider aims concerning masculinity. She sees manly behaviour as a ‘bridge’ to draw varying social classes into the common ground of a middle-class ideology about manliness. Osborne comes from the upper, landed classes who need to be refashioned into someone less Francophile and effeminate and more English

(as evident in Roger's manliness). Dawson in "The Sexton's Hero," on the other hand, is from a lower, working-class background, and needs to adopt middle-class manly values. In addition, Gaskell's middle-class audience also needs 'softening' in accepting the working classes who they frequently perceive as violent.¹⁸² Gaskell thus portrays Dawson with 'softer' characteristics which are not only 'feminine' but also Christian and Christ-like (Constantini 78). As Mariaconcetta Constantini points out, Dawson is Gaskell's reworking of the Frankenstein monster she created in working-class John Barton in her first novel, *Mary Barton* (78). There is some variation, then, in Gaskell's depictions of masculinity, but overall she presents the concept of manliness as a stepping stone to middle-class notions of masculinity and to a more inclusive version of Englishness.

Christian Socialism

The mid-Victorian conflation of virtuous masculinity with self-control became increasingly associated with corporeal control and sporting prowess. Waters comments: "Muscular Christianity marked an important shift in the concept of masculinity during the second half of the nineteenth century, during which the 'feminine' qualities of Christianity, such as compassion and turning the other cheek, were replaced by Arnold's concept of moral earnestness combined with an increasing emphasis on athleticism and patriotism" (74). Furthermore, these changes took place in the context of increasing self-conscious definitions of Englishness, in which the public schools in England, populated largely by the wealthier classes, played an important part. A connected phenomenon in this period, however, was the educating of the lower classes by these public school graduates, in middle-class

¹⁸² See footnote 123 above for a middle-class view of the lower classes.

movements such as Christian Socialism, a scheme that appealed to Unitarians, including Gaskell.

It was primarily the middle classes who felt they personified English civilization and who were sceptical of the contributions made to English national integrity by classes above and below them (Langford 316). Jonas Hanaway stated in 1778: “The genius of our nation is such, that those who move in a sphere *above*, and they who are below the middle rank, are with difficulty kept within bounds” (qtd. in Langford 316). It was not so much that those above and below the middle classes were considered less English than the middle classes, but that the upper classes were less reliably so because of their attraction to Continental life and fashions. The lower classes, too, were frequently “embarrassingly unconstructive in [their] outlook” (Langford 316). In many respects, the public school system assisted the upper classes in developing middle-class notions of ‘hegemonic Englishness,’ and, as I discuss in this section, public school graduates, in turn, educated the lower classes through the Christian Socialist Movement, so that these, too, could acquire the values of English masculinity in the mid-Victorian period. Thus it was through education that the middle-class concept of the English gentleman infiltrated those above and below.

The Christian Socialist Movement was active between 1848 and 1854-55, with its primary focus on educating the working classes (Murray xiii). To some extent the Christian Socialist movement was similar to the public schools in that both ‘movements’ served as a ‘bridge’ to a middle-class form of Englishness. While their audiences differed considerably, the education advocated by both movements inculcated middle-class behaviour and norms. Most of the key players of the Christian Socialist movement were typically middle class, being public-school educated, and affiliated with the Anglican Church. Charles Kingsley, for example, described by Gaskell as her “hero” (*Letters* 90), was both an active Christian

Socialist and a clergyman in the Church of England. Furthermore, his writing was the impetus for the term 'Muscular Christianity.'¹⁸³ John Pennington writes that the Christian Socialists, who aimed to create an organic, Christian society, "were convinced that the Church had an obligation to initiate and guide social action . . . [furthermore] it was a man's religion, that melded courage and faith, spirit and body" (133). Mixing masculinity, personal courage, and one's faith with social action were also Unitarian ideals, and thus it is no surprise that Gaskell approved of Christian Socialism.

One aspect of Christian Socialism that led to more inclusive notions of Englishness was its adoption of Arnold's vision of a reformed, national (that is, English) church, which stressed the importance of science, tolerance, and social action, and downplayed the doctrine of human accountability and sin (Moran 28). Since these aspects were also important to Unitarian thinking, an 'Anglican-Unitarian border' was formed, which attracted many of the cultural and scientific elite of that period (Unsworth 95).¹⁸⁴ Despite Edward Norman's observation that there was little agreement in the Christian Socialist camp (2), the Christian Socialists were united in wanting to create a more inclusive English society, devoting most of their energies in training and educating the working classes who they identified as victims of industrialisation and poverty, in order for the working classes to make a seamless transition into English (middle-class) society. The aim of the Christian Socialists

¹⁸³ The label, 'muscular Christianity,' originated in a review of Charles Kingsley's *Two Years Ago* (1857) in the *Saturday Review* by T.C. Sandars: "We all know by this time what is the task that Mr. Kingsley has made specially his own – it is that of spreading the knowledge and fostering the love of a muscular Christianity. His ideal is a man who fears God and can walk a thousand miles in a thousand hours – who, in the language which Mr. Kingsley has made popular, breathes God's free air on God's rich earth, and at the same time can hit a woodcock, doctor a horse, and twist a poker around his fingers" (qtd. in Hall, *Muscular Christianity* 7).

¹⁸⁴ These included Charles Dickens, John Forster, Florence Nightingale, and Thomas Hughes. Gaskell's son-in-law, Charles Crompton, was also in this group, and a Christian Socialist (Unsworth 96).

was to train the working classes to become muscular Christians, to make ‘manly men’ out of working-class men (Hall, *Muscular Christianity* 55). Christian Socialism was also closely tied to the broad church movement within the Church of England, a reaction against high church ritualism, which was associated in popular imagination with what was perceived as an effeminate, un-English Roman Catholicism (Hilliard 187).

Gaskell was personally acquainted with key Christian Socialists, including Charles Kingsley, Arthur Stanley (who also wrote a biography of Thomas Arnold), Benjamin Jowett, F.D. Maurice, and John Ludlow. In a letter to her sister, Catherine, Emily Winkworth notes Gaskell’s closeness with the Christian Socialist movement. She writes: “Ask Lily [Gaskell] about the breakfast at Monckton Milnes, and Professor Whewell and Guizot and Archdeacon Hare, and Maurice and Ludlow . . . She had good long talks with them, and all about the right things and nothing else” (qtd. in Unsworth 103). Indeed, in his autobiography, Ludlow writes about meeting Gaskell for the first time: “I met at the [Scotts’] house for the first time Mrs. Gaskell, who had just glided into well-deserved fame as the authoress of *Mary Barton*. I found her, as I described her to Kingsley, an ‘entirely lovable creature,’ an intense admirer of the *Saint’s Tragedy*, and ardent for the revival of *Politics for the People*, of which she had been a regular reader, and I may say we were friends from that hour” (150). Both of these publications to which Ludlow refers were written from within the Christian Socialist camp. *Saint’s Tragedy* was a play written by Charles Kingsley, its published version (in 1848) having a preface written by F.D. Maurice, and *Politics for the People* was a publication espousing the views of Christian Socialism.

While *Politics for the People* was not revived, a letter written by Gaskell to her brother-in-law, William Robson, in 1850, indicates her personal involvement in the distribution of other Christian Socialist tracts:

I hope you will not think I have taken too great a liberty in having requested a pamphlet and two papers . . . to be forwarded on to you. The pamphlet is the first of a series 'on Christian Socialism' proposed to be issued by the writers of 'Politics for the People': those writers were as you probably know, the revd Frederick Maurice, the author of No 1 of the Present tracts; the revd Charles Kingsley, (who will soon publish No 2, of tracts of Christian Socialism,) Mr Ludlow, a barrister writer writing under the pseudonym of 'John Townsend', Mr Scott the Prof. of English literature at the University College, &c. They are anxious to obtain a circulation among the working-classes for these tracts . . . Can you help in circulating them . . . (*Letters* 105)

Not only was she actively involved in distributing Christian Socialist tracts, but Gaskell also read the movement's journal, the *Christian Socialist*, as well as *The Germ*, as she indicates in a letter to F.J. Furnivall (*Letters* 386). *The Germ* was published by the avant-garde Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, formed in 1848, and overlapped with Christian Socialism. S.C. Carpenter notes that Christian Socialism was "helped by the novels of Mrs. Gaskell, in whom the group saw an ally" (318). It has been suggested that the subject matter of Pre-Raphaelite Dante Gabrielle Rossetti's art as well as the contents of *The Germ* were inspired by Gaskell's *Ruth* and *Mary Barton* (Grieve 14, 22). Additionally, Gaskell herself was able to contribute to Christian Socialist ideas through her fiction, and in 1851 published two of her short stories in the *Christian Socialist*: "Christmas Storms and Sunshine" and "The Sexton's Hero."

The *Christian Socialist*, which was, according to its cover, "conducted by several of the promoters of the London Working Men's Associations," was edited by John Ludlow (Raven 158). Ludlow wrote in his autobiography that "the reason for the establishment of such a paper was . . . that we had such a large amount of literary talent amongst our working

men which was either lying idle, or forcing its way through wrong channels" (189). This journal, which Ludlow claimed, with some justification, "did most to keep the movement together while it lasted" (Ludlow 188), was thus intended "to speak for all classes" (Ludlow 189), and was both read by, and contributed to, also by the working classes. Norman notes that "The *Christian Socialist* was practical rather than theoretical in its advocacy of Socialism, but it encouraged real social change, the actual structures of society to be replaced" (76-7). It uniquely served as a bridge in the sharing of ideas between the classes in England. Furthermore, since Christian Socialism was largely "a man's religion," a masculine movement, this journal, too, played a role in constructing a form of masculinity in the mid-Victorian period, and, since Gaskell wrote for this journal, she also played a part in these constructions.

In "Christmas Storms and Sunshine," Gaskell continues a theme she started in *Mary Barton* in which two social groups come to a better understanding, and in this way she promotes her social ideal of a unified Englishness. In *Mary Barton*, Gaskell hopes that employers and employees achieve "a perfect understanding, and complete confidence and love" (MB 388), in which these opposing parties "acknowledge the spirit of Christ as the regulating law between [them]" (MB 388). The opposing parties in "Christmas Storms and Sunshine" are two families of differing political persuasions. The husbands of each family are employed by two opposing local newspapers, one "bigoted and Tory" (CCS 89) and the other "new-fangled and Democratic" (CCS 89). In this story Gaskell once more articulates her social vision of an ideal, unified English society. The mending of the feud becomes a trope for Gaskell's vision of an inclusive Englishness where differing parts of society get along. In Gaskell's words: "they make friends" (CSS 97).

Joanne Shattock observes that “Christmas Storms and Sunshine” satirises “the competing political allegiances of the newspaper press” (437n1). It also, however, highlights social and political differences and misunderstandings between ‘old’ English families (represented by the Jenkins family) and ‘new’, upcoming, middle-class families in English society (represented by the Hodgson family). Indeed, this story matches Kingsley’s socialist view that “party politics are selfish politics” (qtd. in Norman 55)¹⁸⁵. Since Christian Socialism in the mid-nineteenth century was, in the main, regarded as a moral and educative concept rather than a political one, Gaskell contributes to Christian Socialism’s moral thrust, ending the story with this maxim: “If any of you have any quarrels, or misunderstandings, or coolnesses, or cold shoulders, or shynesses, or tiffs, or miffs, or huffs, with anyone else, just make friends” (CCS 97).¹⁸⁶ Gaskell’s point is that political feuding has no place in an ideal, new (middle-class) society, and participants in this society need to resolve their differences, and “make friends” (CCS 97). That is, opposing sides should develop tolerant attitudes in order to get on with each other. Indeed, “Christmas Storms and Sunshine” echoes the vision articulated by Ludlow in *Politics for the People* (July supplement, 1848), that Socialism reminds men of the imperative of human partnership. According to Ludlow, Socialism “means nothing of itself but the science of making men partners . . . [and is] the only effectual remedy [against] the starvation and degradation of the workman” (qtd. in Norman 77). Gaskell adds her voice to the Christian Socialist theme that English society be reorganised in such a ways that all classes would work together in partnership.

¹⁸⁵ This quotation comes from *Politics for the People*, No. 2 (13 May 1848) and was written by Charles Kingsley.

¹⁸⁶ For more detail on Christian Socialism’s moral (rather than political) thrust, see Norman (8).

It can be deduced from “The Sexton’s Hero,” which was also published in the *Christian Socialist*, that this re-formed ideal society is largely male, although this story, unexpectedly, departs somewhat from popular versions of ‘Muscular Christianity.’ Indeed, it grapples with the question of manly courage and what this entails. The story revolves around the question of what makes a hero, and includes the story told by the elderly male sexton about events in his youth, to his young, male audience about the ultimate hero in this story, Gilbert Dawson. The story provides a contrast between the young men’s earlier discussion of a hero, one who “acts up to the highest idea of duty . . . [a] military hero . . . whose manifestation consists in injury to others” (SH 73-4), and Dawson’s heroism. By the story’s conclusion, the implication is clear, that Dawson’s heroism is far superior to the “poor, unchristian heroism” (SH 74) the young men have been discussing. Gaskell’s foregrounding of a heroism unlike that achieved in military glory aligns her, in this aspect of Christian Socialism, more with Ludlow than with Charles Kingsley and F.D. Maurice, who are described by Norman as “enthusiastic militarist[s]” (55). Thus, despite her enthusiasm for Kingsley in other areas, Gaskell held particular views of military glory that varied from his.¹⁸⁷

From the outset of his introduction in this story, Gilbert Dawson is depicted as both working class (he works for a cooper) and, at the same time, as exhibiting the qualities of the new, mid-century gentleman. Indeed, he displays the qualities of ‘Muscular Christianity.’ Not only is he physically strong, described as a “strapping . . . chap . . . six feet high” and an excellent cricketer, but he is also morally superior, so that “I [the sexton] kept my rough ways out of sight for a time, I felt so ashamed of his getting to know them” (SH 74). Dawson exemplifies Colls’ point that the concept of manliness is a ‘bridge’ that spans class divides.

¹⁸⁷ In this Gaskell is consistent with her Unitarianism; most Unitarians advocated pacifism (Uglow 147).

He is a working-class gentleman. This story was published for a wide audience in a journal intended for all classes, and suggests that gentlemanliness is not determined by class. Moreover, since the *Christian Socialist* had a clear, didactic purpose, this story appeals to its multi-class audience for changed attitudes concerning masculinity.

Gaskell complicates this story, however, by having the “fine active young fellow” (SH 75), Dawson, commit a social faux pas that is at odds with popular notions of ‘Muscular Christianity.’ Tosh writes that “[p]hysical prowess and readiness for combat” were considered essential qualities of manliness in this period (*Man’s Place* 111). Dawson, however, will not fight, saying that “I think it is wrong to quarrel, and use violence” (SH 75). As discussed above, hegemonic masculinity in the mid-nineteenth century developed into ‘Muscular Christianity,’ and, in line with these social constructions, Dawson is treated as a social pariah after his declaration of non-violence. He is now seen as un-English: “folks looked at him . . . as if he’d been a monkey or a foreigner” (SH 75).

By the story’s conclusion, however, Dawson is vindicated in self-sacrificially saving the lives of the sexton and his wife, Lettie, by giving them his horse in order to escape the rushing tide in the rising darkness, despite the threat to his own life, which he ultimately loses. Gaskell presents a ‘Muscular Christianity’ focused on physical and moral superiority, but, in doing so, wrestles with the question of what moral courage and physical strength look like if they are separated from fighting. In this story she presents a form of courage divorced from physical superiority over an opponent, concluding that “Of a surety, sir, there’s call enough for bravery in the service of God, and to show love to man, without quarrelling and fighting” (SH 80).

There is a further example of heroism in this story, found in the sexton’s lonely life: his “stoical heroism, the courage not of action but of endurance” (Uglow 149). Lettie, too, dies,

within two years of Dawson. The story records that “[s]he was never like the same again” (SH 80) and that the baby to whom they were returning on that fateful night “was later carried off in teething,” and that after that “Lettie just quietly drooped, and died in less than a six week” (SH 80). As Uglow argues, the sexton faces a different terror to that experienced by Dawson, but, like Dawson, he, too, demonstrates courage (148).

In “The Sexton’s Hero,” Gaskell grapples with the concept of manly courage, in the context of Christian Socialism. In doing so, she presents a heroism that, while still courageous, is closely aligned with love and self-sacrifice. Furthermore, she presents this construction of courage not in middle-class public school educated men but in working-class men (both Dawson and the sexton are working-class). Gaskell suggests to her working-class audience that ‘true’ Englishmen embrace these middle-class views of manliness. Gaskell thus contributed to Christian Socialist ideals of wanting to change the social fabric of Englishness in which middle-class ideals of manliness are embraced.

Extending Englishness in *Ruth*

I conclude this chapter with a discussion of *Ruth* (1853). Not only does this novel clearly reveal Gaskell’s proto-feminist sympathies,¹⁸⁸ but it also qualifies the middle-class emphasis in her version of Englishness. Thus far in this chapter, I have argued that Gaskell advocates widening the parameters of Englishness by including women, as well as men from both the upper and lower classes educated according to the principles of the public school movement and Christian Socialism, all ordinarily excluded from the (masculine) ‘in group.’ In this final section, I will suggest that in *Ruth* Gaskell extends Englishness by championing another kind of man, Thurstan Benson, who, because of his physical deformity, does not exhibit ‘Muscular

¹⁸⁸ It is a searing indictment on the misuse by men of vulnerable women in England.

Christianity.’ Neither is he a self-made, middle-class man, as is Mr. Bradshaw, another character in *Ruth*. Indeed, as will be seen, there is much about Benson that places him outside popular notions of Englishness. At the same time, in this novel Gaskell also qualifies her version of middle-class Englishness in her characterization of Bradshaw – while he may be a law-abiding, church-going, self-made middle-class man, he also needs to demonstrate a social-minded morality that is an essential element in Gaskell’s Englishness.¹⁸⁹

Ruth is a sympathetic portrayal of an unmarried mother, Ruth Hilton, a defenceless young woman who is seduced and then abandoned by Henry Bellingham, an aristocratic rake, later giving birth to their (illegitimate) child. While Gaskell knows that Ruth is, by the standards of her society, “an *unfit* subject for fiction” (*Letters* 220), she compounds this not only by vindicating Ruth at the novel’s conclusion but also through her portrayal of the three main male characters in this novel, Henry Bellingham, Mr. Bradshaw, and Thurstan Benson.

Gaskell complicates social roles and values through her positive portrayal of Benson. Benson, who lives with his sister, Faith Benson, is an unmarried minister of a Dissenting church, as well as a hunchback whose physical deformities render him weak and unable to perform many ‘manly’ activities. Nevertheless, as Ruth’s saviour and benefactor, he is the story’s masculine hero. He not only provides her with physical sustenance, but also supplies her way of moral escape in a context where there are few options for survival available for single mothers, the most common being prostitution.¹⁹⁰ Benson introduces Ruth into his

¹⁸⁹ Indeed, this characterised Gaskell’s own life, seen, for example, in her selfless assistance of Manchester’s poor during the cotton famines in the 1860s, due to the American Civil War and the subsequent decline of raw cotton imports (Uglow 503).

¹⁹⁰ In her introduction to the Pickering and Chatto edition of *Ruth*, Deirdre d’Albertis defines fallenness as “that historically specific category of moral experience reserved in the nineteenth century for women tainted by sexual knowledge and therefore presumed to be lost to respectable society” (*Ruth* viii). I agree with d’Albertis that this novel is not about prostitution, but about the slippery nature of the term ‘fallen woman’ (*Ruth* ix). At the same

home and church community as the recently widowed Mrs. Denbigh, and her “grace and beauty” (RU 149) quickly make her a favourite of all she meets. Ironically, however, to maintain Ruth’s moral standing, Benson has to lower his own standards of morality by lying. Unlike Bellingham, however, who lowers his morality selfishly in order to advance himself, Benson willingly suffers for his moral lapse because he does it for another, Ruth. Gaskell indicates in this that the qualifications for gentlemanly behaviour should be nuanced. While Samuel Smiles’ dictum that “above all the gentleman is truthful” (qtd. in Dennis and Skilton 55) was accepted as the general norm, Gaskell suggests through her portrayal of Benson that even a gentleman can, for the sake of another, tell a lie. Indeed, despite his moral lapse, Benson typifies Thomas Arnold’s vision of a “thorough English gentleman, - Christian, manly, and enlightened” (qtd. in Stanley 2:339).

Gaskell is, however, scathing of the other two stereotypical male characters in this novel, Bellingham, the upper society ‘gentleman’ who causes Ruth’s downfall in the first place – whom she portrays as self-centred, unkind, and corrupt – and Bradshaw. Bellingham is first introduced as the ‘gentleman’ escort of an upper-class young woman, Miss Duncombe, at a dance where it is rumoured that the two will get married. Ruth mends Miss Duncombe’s dress at this dance, receiving a camellia flower for her efforts from Bellingham. Ruth and Bellingham meet again by chance the next day, when Bellingham saves the life of a young, working-class boy from drowning. Unable to stand the stench of the hut in which the boy lives, however, Bellingham impatiently leaves before the arrival of the doctor, instead giving Ruth a sovereign with which to tend to the boy’s welfare. Bellingham is portrayed as

time, I argue that the spectre of public condemnation of ‘fallen’ women and the subsequent probability of their becoming prostitutes lies in the subtext of this novel. In relation to this, Coral Lansbury points out that Gaskell’s perception was that most women became prostitutes because they were barred from finding other well-paid work in English society (52).

deficient in his ability to empathise with working-class poverty – he reacts to events in a highhanded, insensitive manner, which includes telling the boy’s grandmother to clean up her home since it is “more fit for pigs than human beings” (RU 25). Before leaving the house, however, Bellingham is overcome by Ruth’s beauty and, by an “irresistible impulse” (RU 24), he arranges to meet up with her on her next day off from Mrs. Masons’. In this, Bellingham is portrayed as subject to his selfish impulses, lacking the self-control necessary to a Victorian gentleman. The remainder of the narrative records his selfishness and consequent lapses in morality. For example, he first seduces Ruth and then convinces her to holiday with him at a guest house in Wales. Furthermore, he takes no responsibility for her but allows his mother to take him home when he becomes ill. Later, posing as Mr. Donne, he convinces Mr. Bradshaw to participate in bribery during the parliamentary campaign. At this time, when his path once again crosses that of Ruth’s, he is once more obsessed with her beauty, tormenting her despite her obvious wish to have nothing more to do with him. Indeed, to the end, his interest in Ruth focuses on her external beauty alone (RU 369, 371). Despite his pedigree (his family harks back to Cromwell’s Long Parliament), his enormous wealth, and his social standing, Bellingham is not an example of a ‘true’ mid-Victorian gentleman. Indeed, Gaskell suggests that, Bellingham, too, needs to learn the new version of middle-class gentlemanly behaviour.

Gaskell is equally scathing of Mr. Bradshaw, although by the novel’s conclusion she allows him to change somewhat. On one level, Bradshaw, being a self-made man, epitomises the nineteenth century ideal of industry and the middle-class work ethic, and is a prosperous and respected member of society. In this respect, he comes close to the mark of English masculinity (and hence of Englishness) at that time, but, unlike John Thornton in *North and South*, another self-made industrialist, Bradshaw’s masculinity falls short. He is initially

portrayed as a religious bully who seeks to dominate everyone he meets. Terence Wright refers to him as “that monster of oppressiveness, self-righteousness and inward corruption” (88). The first references to him confirm Wright’s views. For example, Faith Benson remarks to her brother that Bradshaw has forbidden his children to play with the Dixons because the Dixons play charades (RU 95), and Thurstan Benson comments that Bradshaw is “so severe, so inflexible” (RU 105). The reader finally meets Bradshaw in a church meeting. The novel records that, whilst “the country people came in sleeking down their hair, and treading with earnest attempts at noiseless lightness of step over the floor of the aisle” (RU 128), Bradshaw, ironically referred to as the church’s “apex” (RU 128), makes no attempt to be either humble or quiet. Rather:

Mr Bradshaw’s great bass voice [was] half a note in advance of the others, in accordance with his place of precedence as principal member of the congregation. His powerful voice was like an organ very badly played, and very much out of tune; but as he had no ear, and no diffidence, it pleased him very much to hear the fine loud sound. He was a tall, large-boned, iron man; stern, powerful, and authoritative in appearance. (RU 128-29)

Bradshaw’s unattractive example of English masculinity is also apparent in the description of drinking tea at the Bradshaws’ home. He is an unpleasant, jarring element in this domestic activity that normally, in Gaskell’s work, epitomises Englishness.¹⁹¹

There was tea, the equipage for which was as handsome and as ugly as money could purchase. Then the ladies produced their sewing, while Mr. Bradshaw stood before the fire, and gave the assembled party the benefit of his opinion on many subjects. The opinions were as good and excellent as the opinions of any

¹⁹¹ See chapter three on a discussion of tea and Englishness.

man can be who sees one side of a case very strongly, and almost ignores the other. They coincided in many points with those held by Mr Benson, but he once or twice interposed with a plea for those who might differ; and then he was heard by Mr Bradshaw with a kind of evident and indulgent pity, such as one feels for a child who unwittingly talks nonsense. By-and-by, Mrs Bradshaw and Miss Benson fell into one *tête-a-tête*, and Ruth and Jemima into another. Two well-behaved but unnaturally quiet children were sent to bed early in the evening, in an authoritative voice, by their father, because one of them had spoken too loud while he was enlarging on an alteration in the tariff. (RU 157)

Not only is Bradshaw loud, opinionated, overly authoritative, rude, patronising, and unfair, but also he maintains a strict separation of spheres. There is no mention, for example, of the women participating in the conversation. Indeed, that they have their own quiet *tête-a-têtes* seems only possible with his permission. Furthermore, there is a hint that Benson's "plea for those who might differ" (RU 157) may be an effort to include the views of the female members of the party who are silenced by Bradshaw. Bradshaw epitomises masculine opinions that effectively exclude and silence women, children, and servants, thereby limiting notions of equality and inclusiveness in this tea drinking ritual. Indeed, Gaskell hints that tea-drinking in this household does not exhibit an Englishness of which Gaskell approves; the scathing reference to the tea service being "as handsome and as ugly as money can purchase" contrasts sharply with "the delicious glow of the fire, the bright light that revelled in every corner of the room, the savoury smells, the comfortable sounds of a boiling kettle" (MB 18) of the tea party in *Mary Barton*. Indeed, it represents a repressive, overbearing, and authoritarian Englishness that Gaskell intensely disliked but which was nevertheless part of England at that time.

Whilst Bradshaw's views about 'fallen' women are part of mainstream, masculine opinion in Gaskell's period, Gaskell does not allow these opinions to ultimately succeed in this novel. Indeed, despite Bradshaw's initial belligerent condemnation of Ruth (and the Bensons) when he finds out that she is a 'fallen' woman, by the novel's conclusion Ruth has been vindicated to all, including Bradshaw. Even prior to Ruth's death, Bradshaw's stance towards the Bensons softens after the events surrounding the discovery of (his son) Richard's forgery, in which Richard steals a vast sum of money from Thurstan Benson. Bradshaw subsequently disowns his son, but Richard is gradually redeemed, not least through Benson's refusal to prosecute him. The final paragraphs of the novel are dedicated to Bradshaw, who (after Ruth's death) is "anxious to do something to testify his respect for the woman who, if all had entertained his opinions, would have been driven into hopeless sin" (RU 374). He is at the chapel-yard discussing with a stonemason the details of a tombstone for Ruth's grave when he comes across Ruth's grieving son, Leonard. Consistent with his change of heart, Bradshaw places a sympathetic hand on Leonard's shoulder and takes him home, the novel concluding thus: "The first time, for years, that he had entered Mr. Benson's house, [Bradshaw] came leading and comforting [Ruth's] son – and, for a moment, he could not speak to his old friend, for the sympathy which choked up his voice, and filled his eyes with tears" (RU 374-75). While this scene is not entirely believable, it does enable Gaskell to inject a modicum of hope and optimism at the end of this novel, not least in intimating the possibility of change in mainstream, masculine thinking about 'fallen' women, as well as in the redemption of an intolerant form of middle-class Englishness.

Thus, through the characterisation of Bellingham, Bradshaw and Benson, Gaskell presents her view of a progressive, tolerant, inclusive Englishness. She rejects the masculinity represented by Bellingham, and also, to some extent, the attitudes displayed in

Bradshaw. Moreover, in her depiction of Benson as the masculine hero in this novel, she introduces 'new' aspects to masculinity, including that of physical deformity. He doesn't fit into mainstream masculine Englishness in the nineteenth century, which favoured muscular young men, and is thus another example in Gaskell's fiction that challenges gender ideologies of the nineteenth century, questioning and extending notions of Englishness. Indeed, it demonstrates once again Gaskell's optimistic view of gradual (evolutionary) change within English society in which the 'in group' of Englishness continues to expand.

Conclusion

Gaskell's Englishness, which envisages a slowly evolving and flatter English social system incorporating a wider selection of the English population than was the norm in her period, is underpinned by her Unitarian faith. As a Unitarian, she assumed an essential goodness in humankind, making social progress possible, if not inevitable. Moreover, the Unitarians of her time, including her scholarly husband, welcomed the increasing influence of scientists such as Charles Darwin, and this informed Gaskell's depictions of a 'new' Englishness more attuned to modern, rational thinking than to, for example, myths surrounding 'old' blood or past national glories.

Gaskell's Unitarianism also contributed to her love for England itself. She was less concerned about England's empire, described in *Cousin Phillis* as "out there," and its associated activities of spreading English civilization and converting foreign races to Christianity, but her focus, like that of most Unitarians of her time, was fixed firmly on social problems at home, in England. She was concerned about those excluded from the 'in group' assumed in nineteenth-century Englishness – largely Protestant, male, Anglo-Saxon, and middle-class – and this fuelled a vision for a more democratic, egalitarian Englishness seeking to reconcile social divisions within England itself. Indeed, Gaskell's gender and religion meant that she too was, technically speaking, 'other' in popular notions of Englishness in her period. Yet, England (and particularly London) was inevitably the heart of the British Empire and, as the nineteenth century progressed, it became increasingly difficult to separate the concepts of England, Britain, and the imperial activities of the British Empire, which English minds (including Gaskell's) tended to fuse: in many ways the British Empire was English. This adds complexity to Gaskell's Englishness, in that while, as a

Unitarian, she did not share her compatriots' vision of having an empire – and, indeed, became increasingly insular, seeing the empire as a threatening appendage and favouring, instead, England's green and pleasant land at 'home' – at the same time, her writing was still framed by popular notions of English racial superiority, and England's 'right' to engage in imperial trade in products such as tea, cotton, and opium.

While Gaskell challenges the Englishness of her period, especially from a Unitarian and female perspective, her middle-class bias reveals ambiguity in her depiction of a democratic Englishness. She demonstrates an optimistic view of gradual (evolutionary) change within English society in which the values and behaviour of middle-class Englishness can be learned and achieved by a wider stratum of the English population. In seeking to ameliorate divisions within her society, to increase the size of the 'in group' of Englishness, she advocates the adoption of middle-class behaviour and habits. She does this in her tea-drinking scenes, for example, where characters from both the lower classes (the Bartons in *Mary Barton*) and the rising industrial classes (John Thornton in *North and South*) are drawn into the supremely English activity of drinking tea with its middle-class rituals and accoutrements. Gaskell also does this in her depictions of masculinity, in her suggestion that men in the 'out group' of nineteenth-century Englishness (such as the aristocratic dandy and the working-class man) should assimilate the behaviours of the 'in group' of nineteenth-century Englishness, the middle classes.

Gaskell's contribution to nineteenth-century Englishness is summed up in her novella, *The Moorland Cottage* (1850), where Frank Buxton asks searchingly: "What can we do? We are less than drops in the ocean, as far as our influence can go to re-model a nation" (MC 61). Frank asks this bleak question after his family has been swindled and he is confronted with the negative effects of England's Industrial Revolution, an imbalanced

society endlessly revolving around money, and his solution is to abandon England in search of a “newer and purer state of society” (MC 62). His interlocutor (Maggie Brown) has another perspective, however, and I believe that she speaks for Elizabeth Gaskell. She urges Frank to stay:

“But cannot you bravely face these evils, and learn their nature and causes; and then has God given you no powers to apply to the discovery of their remedy? Dear Frank, think! It may be very little you can do, —and you may never see the effect of it, any more than the widow saw the world-wide effect of her mite. Then, if all the good and thoughtful men run way from us to some new country, what are we to do with our poor, dear Old England?” (MC 61)

While Maggie knows that all is not perfect in “dear Old England” she is optimistic that even the smallest contribution (the widow’s mite) could have a significant impact on improving English society. Maggie loves England too much to abandon it. The same can be said about Gaskell. Despite what she observed and knew about English society, not least the excesses and deprivations caused by the Industrial Revolution, she was optimistic that society would improve. Indeed, Gaskell was conscious that the “powers” God had given her to remedy the situation, if only in some small way, involved writing about it, as her Preface to *Mary Barton* makes clear (MB 3-4). She deeply loved England, and it is this optimism and love that lies at the heart of her version of Englishness. That is, the way to “face these evils . . . to apply . . . their remedy” is to challenge prevailing ideas about Englishness, and, instead, to flatten England’s social structure by allowing more people into the ‘in group,’ while, on the other hand, insisting they become *one of us*, the middle-classes. It is incorrect to state that Gaskell set out to *remodel* England, but her literary contributions to this ‘remodelling’ should not be

underestimated. Gaskell's fiction is important cultural work that articulated, challenged, and also contributed to the fluidity of notions of Englishness in the mid-nineteenth century.

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